

***AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CAT ON A
JOURNEY FROM CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA,
TO TITUSVILLE FLORIDA ON A 45 ft. KETCH***

**By Bruce Whiteley
Unpublished**

PROLOGUE

This is a beautiful story of a cat named Chris who made an exciting ocean voyage with the author, Bruce Whiteley, his two children, Philip and Karin Whiteley, and three other crew members.

Chris was born in the Orange Free State, a province in South Africa. The author writes with an engaging charm about the cat's experiences before the journey and of the unforgettable experiences on a 45 ft. yacht on a voyage from Cape Town South. Africa, to Titusville, Florida in the United States, in 1982.

CHAPTER I.

Call me Chris. That is because my name is Christmas, which is a very stupid name to give to any cat with the least pretension to self respect. One of the facts of life is that we do not choose our names and while a human might have Irving O'Shlugmeyer stuck on him at birth, he can become Randy Grant by the time he is twenty-one. Or Grant Randy. But a cat cannot change his name. He is stuck with it and the only way to avoid the constant humiliation caused by the repetition of a ridiculous appellation is to ignore it and never respond to it. That is what I do. Also, I must admit, humans are too lazy to use two syllables when they can use one, so I am usually called Chris anyway, which makes things easier.

I got my name at what was the low point of my life, about six weeks after I was born. How I do not remember, but I suddenly found myself at dusk in a field with tall grass all around me, the temperature dropping, and an acute awareness of the emptiness of my stomach becoming more and more pressing. Had I known where I was at the time, I probably would have panicked, but I did not know that I was in the Orange Free State, which is in South Africa, and that the creatures around me--the rats, mice, and snakes, to say nothing of the predators of the air--would have made short work of a small, hungry kitten. Undoubtedly that ignorance saved me. Instead of carefully hiding myself, I boldly jumped over the long grass in the greatest hops I could manage, plowed through some thistles, waded through the mud in a ditch, scrambled over a fallen dead tree, and emerged on a dusty road just as a little human came walking by.

I have since learned that it is the easiest thing in the world to work a human being if he is at least sane and does not have a prejudice against cats in general. It is hard to imagine why but there are some people who do not like cats and others who will torture, maim or kill a cat just for the fun of it. As long as a cat is on his own, he can only avoid these people, and all people, because if you get close to a crazy you've had it. But if you acquire a human of your own you can have lots of fun with both types. The nut-case who would like to tie a can to your tail and pour some kerosene over your rear end will not dare touch you because your person will thump him one or call a cop. You can amuse yourself greatly by just lying there and looking at your tormentor. And if he comes close to you, you can scream and bite him once or twice, as though he had stepped on your tail. It is a fine thing to watch him apologize to you while the blood is running down his leg. Those people who are not sadistic but just do not like cats are even more fun. Let one come into your house and sit down and you have it made. Then you purr like mad and climb onto his lap and rub yourself against him, especially on the face. It is best if you

can cover him with your loose hair, but if your coat is not shedding you can always knead him with your forepaws and often inflict irreparable damage to his clothing.

But these are things I have learned over the years, not part of the instinctive knowledge that I had when I emerged from that field in the Orange Free State. All I knew at the time was that I was hungry and humans have food, so I ran up to the little fellow and purred at him as loudly as I could and rubbed against his leg. I did not know it then, but that is the way to work a human. They are so insecure and gullible that the slightest demonstration of affection will throw them into voluntary bondage forever. They will feed you on demand, keep your bed warm and clean, and brush your coat every day, and all you have to do is purr at them now and then.

The kid I met that evening was true to form. He thought I was cute, in spite of the mud and crap that covered me. He picked me up and carried me to a house, which was just what I wanted because everybody knows that houses are always full of food. Then it was "Look what I found Daddy! Look how sweet she is!" and all that nonsense. After all, I had found him and I am not a she, but that didn't make much difference at the time. I can put up with ignorance if I'm hungry enough.

The whole family gathered around to have a look at me and I played along with the farce, pretending that I was as pleased as punch to see them and that I loved them to bits, while I looked around the place for something to eat or at least a warm corner to curl up in while they prepared my dinner. But there was no dinner coming. The kid's sister ran to get me some milk, but Daddy, a big fat slob with glasses and no hair on his head, started babbling about how they did not want a cat, how it would be cruel to feed me and then kick me out into the cold again, how I probably belonged to somebody else, and a lot more of like nature, including some incoherent nonsense about fleas and rabies. All of his arguments were, of course, just so much hogwash. He didn't know it, but the question had already been decided--by me--and I am one who sticks by his decisions. I was going to stay.

There was some doubt in my mind, however, as to the desirability of his remaining, a doubt that almost became a certainty when the silly fool picked me up and carried me back to the field and tossed me into the long grass. That was an exercise in futility. Before he had gotten halfway back to the house, I was purring and rubbing against his leg and actually made it through the front door before he did, much to the delight of the kiddies. Once more, he took me back to the field, this time carrying a glass of water which he threw at me, presumably to discourage me from returning again. That shows how stupid he was at the time. Cats may not be fond of getting wet, but water has never dissuaded one of us from getting what he wants. Not only did I beat Daddy back to the house again, but I also dried myself on his socks without missing a beat in the longest purring session I have ever undertaken.

The upshot of the whole affair was that I was fed, given a blanket to sleep on, and named, because it was Christmas Eve, Christmas.

The family I adopted comprised three generations. The eldest was Ouma, which means Grandmother in Afrikaans. As a kitten I did not realize that all people look huge to a baby, But Ouma was a diminutive lady, and as I grew up she became smaller. When I reached my full height, she continued to get smaller. She is still getting smaller. When she was eighty she was over five feet high and now she is under four feet ten. Every year shrinks her a little more. The word is that she will never die. She will simply disappear.

Next is Mommy-Lampie-Walda. She is the daughter of Ouma and the wife of Daddy-Fatso-Lampie. They had one litter consisting of Karin-Rink and Philip-Phlop. These humans seemed to think two offspring at a time was hot stuff, but it would be considered shirking on the part of any self-respecting queen or female of the feline species.

The confusion of names is art of the human habit of complicating everything. I have found that every person has at least two names and some have as many as ten or twelve. Which name is used depends upon who is using it, how he feels toward the addressee, what their relationship is, the mood he is in at the moment of addressing, and so on through an immense list of variables. Jonathan Andrew Smith will be Mr. Smith to strangers; Mr. Smith, Sir, to employees; or Fathead, if he is not within earshot; Jonathan to his Mother; Johnny to the guys he plays golf with; Coochie-Poo to his wife; Daddy to his kids; and Bigfoot to his dog. The same was true with my family and I can assure you it was difficult for a youthful cat to learn to identify the various labels or nicknames and match them with the appropriate human.

I grew up in Frankfurt in the Orange Free State, which is in itself an achievement of no little magnitude. There are lots of cats in Frankfurt in the Orange Free State who do not grow up at all. They get bitten by dogs; stepped on by horses and donkeys; run over by cars, trucks, tractors, harvesters; are thrown into the river in sacks or run wild in the corn fields; and are eventually shot by some kid with a .22 and a sense of virtue derived from the mistaken impression that he is ridding the world of a pest. I'll grant you that much of the problem is the fault of the cats themselves. Many haven't the intelligence or the sense of dignity to survive. They are too trusting and too scatterbrained. They get themselves into situations that could be avoided by developing a better understanding of what and who they are; situations that are at best awkward and at worst fatal. They lose sight of that basic, self-evident truth, the awareness of which has never left me: the most important thing in the universe is me.

Once that concept has been fully grasped it is obvious that each cat is faced with an awesome responsibility. Maintaining the most important thing in the universe requires an intensity of egotism and an unswerving devotion to one's self and the image one presents, that it is not easy to keep up in the face of the numerous distractions the world provides. Even such basic considerations as creature comforts take on an immense importance simply because they are related to me. A mundane thing like my dinner, for example, becomes much more than the bowl of milk and corn meal I enjoyed that first Christmas Eve. Then I devoured it because I was young and hungry, but now I know that the gratitude I expressed at the time was uncalled for. That bowl was my due simply because I am me. Now, older and wiser, I never ask for my dinner. I come at the appointed hour, and the food had better be there or I give whoever is responsible a look of withering scorn. And it better be satisfactory, too, or I will not eat it under any circumstances. Often I have left a plate of garbage sitting on my newspaper for hours to get it through the thick head of the chef that it was not good enough and that I would rather starve than accept anything below standard. At such times I comport myself with such obviously outraged dignity that even the stupidest of humans cannot fail to get the point and I am invariably presented with a tasty repast, which I accept as though I were conferring a favor. Training humans takes time and is never-ending because they constantly revert, but it is necessary if the importance of one's self is to be maintained.

The same is true when one considers the question of dogs. They are surely the most ridiculous creatures ever created. Clumsy, obsequious, dirty, stupid, constantly slobbering at one end and pissing out the other; thoughtlessly dashing about in circles, scratching, howling, barking, and easily amused, they are, incredible as it sounds, sometimes dangerous to cats. That is when there are two or more together. Then they egg each other on--slobber-slobber, yap-yap--and it is likely that the cat will be bitten. But one dog against a cat with the proper sense of his own worth hasn't a chance.

I shall never forget my first confrontation with the mutt from down the street. I was sitting under a bush enjoying the shade when I saw the idiot coming along aimlessly, sniffing all over the place and lifting his leg in the most disgusting manner at every post or pillar he encountered. Just watching him reinforced my sense of superiority. That he had no set purpose was obvious as he zigged and zagged back and forth across the street, completely oblivious to any of the dangers surrounding him and a possible need to take cover. I remember thinking that no cat, however stupid, would traipse around like that. Even when wandering aimlessly, a cat will move from one predetermined spot to another, stopping to check out the world from a safe place before moving on to another safe place. One has only to look at a cat moving and one has the impression that he is going somewhere, that there is a purpose to his travels, a destination.

Not so with this mutt, or with any other. He would trot eastwards for a while, come to a rock on the verge of the street, sniff at it as though it was important, circle it, piss on it, and log off again, heading west. He had to stop and look at something every thirty seconds or so, and usually each pause was followed by a change in direction. This was no careful examination of his surroundings, such as a cat would undertake, but a random selection of things to be investigated and then forgotten, indicating an attention span of about ten seconds. For several minutes I watched his approach to my area, until he got downwind of me and I saw him catch my scent and stiffen. His expression of obtuse puzzlement was hilarious. Dogs are such ingenuous morons that a mere dance at one from a distance will tell you all about him. He looks happy, sad, cold, hot, hungry, full, good, or bad. His whole body and the way he moves indicates the emotional state he is experiencing at a given moment and this fool was no exception. There he was, bumbling along, and suddenly he hits a strange scent. Bingos and he stops and sniffs the air while trying to peer through short-sighted eyes. Then there are a few tentative steps forward and some more sniffing, and all the time his entire being is saying through his posture, his movements, his carriage, "Hey, wass iss' Wass is? Hoose air?"

I simply lay there in the shade and watched him as he came closer and closer until he practically tripped over me and then I spat at him without even standing up. It was delightful to watch his alarm, especially so when one considers that he should not have been surprised at all. He had been following the scent of a living creature, he knew that much, and was then taken aback to find before him--amazing!--a living creature: He leapt back when I spat at him, almost tripping over his own feet, and then started yapping hysterically while dancing around my bush, making short charges in my direction but staying well away from any harm I might have inflicted upon him. There was plenty of noise, plenty of movement, and nothing else. To look at him you would have thought he had cornered nothing less than a starved tiger, and to hear him would have given you the impression that he alone was preventing the dissolution of the world and required assistance. "Hey! Look-look-look-- grrrrr--gonna-bitem, gonna-bitem, gonna-bitem--

hey-hey-hey." And all the time I lay there watching him, and waiting. He charged closer, and retreated; closer and retreated, and carried on until he was out of breath. Then he cautiously crept up to have a good sniff, whereupon I reached up and cut off half his nose with two swipes of my left paw. He went tearing down the street with his tail between his legs, making more noise, if possible, than he had before and attracting most of the other dogs in the neighborhood. They all milled around, wowing and bowing and generally following the normal canine parliamentary procedure, which entails a lot of pissing on anything remotely vertical and sniffing each other's arses, and usually results in a fight or two. Had one of that lot had the intelligence of a retarded kitten, I would have been a dead cat had I remained under my bush, but not one of them did and, anyway, I was already in the house, cleaning the muck off my left paw.

The result of that confrontation was that we (his name was Wagter, which means guard in Frankfurt in the Orange Free State) developed what could be called a working relationship. Whenever he inadvertently wandered into my territory (he was so stupid that he would often follow his nose into places he didn't want to go), he would sooner or later catch my scent and leave immediately. Sometimes I would amuse myself by allowing him to get well into my yard and then suddenly show myself. I would stroll up to him with every appearance of casual friendship, which puzzled him no end, and belt him one as soon as he was off guard. But, after a few such encounters, even his minute brain grasped the fact that I was dangerous to him and he would run off as soon as he was aware of where he was. That is a desirable state of mind to instill in any dog. He is at a disadvantage, is confused, and presents no danger wherever you meet him because dogs do not really have a true sense of territory. Where a cat's domain is bounded by the turf he can control, a dog needs artificial barriers, like a fence or a length of rope, to show him what he is supposed to look after. That is because dogs are basically cowards. Given half a chance they will run from danger, but if they are cornered they will do a fair, job of guarding, simply for self-preservation. A dog enclosed by a six-foot fence is a desperate character. He senses his vulnerability and, being scared stiff, is best left alone. A wandering dog like Wagter is useless as a guard, and once thoroughly trained, no danger to a cat with a sense of his own worth.

It is that sense of my own worth that accounts for my success with Wagter, and with all dogs. Had I been less than completely self-contained, less thoroughly egotistical, I might have looked upon him as an interesting part of nature; might have accepted him as a fellow-traveler on the highway of life, and would undoubtedly have paid dearly for my folly. But, aware of my superiority, I refused to accord even the dignity of adversary. I simply taught him the little his intelligence could assimilate in as efficient and brutally obvious a manner as I could devise in order to establish in his mind what was already perfectly clear in mine- that he was nothing and I was all.

Any amusement I may have derived from Cl-i3 training was totally one-sided. If I allowed him moments of pleasurable illusion, such as the time I let him think we were going to "play" together (and almost took out his left eye), I quickly cleared up that misconception. Light moments such as that were, I confess, entertaining, but only because they were tangible manifestations of my superiority, and not because Wagter had any more standing in my estimation, than a post in a field. I did not need him to prove my value to me or to provide a yardstick by which I could measure myself, but every once in a while, in a carefree moment, I would "play" with him (my definition of play, rot his), in

the same way I would occasionally "play" with a ball of string or a mouse.

There is something about a predictable reaction, especially if it is repeated. As when Daddy puts a hat on his bald head and comes out to cut the grass. With his vision cut off above and his gaze concentrated below on the lawn in front of him, he never sees the limb of a tree and invariably bashes his head when he passes under it. That is something I have learned to look forward to. When he starts up that smelly, noisy machine, I run to the window and watch him. Up and down he goes, stepping out at a good pace and gradually getting closer to the tree, building up the suspense until, finally, with the inevitability of death, whammo!--he hits the branch, knocks off the hat and staggers around for a few minutes, clutching his head. I don't bear the poor old twit any malice, and I can't give the tree any credit for what happens, but the performance is funny as hell because it is predictable.

It was the same with Wagter. If I condescended to notice him it was because I knew in advance how our meeting would end. He would be running off with a new wound, and I would be chuckling to myself in the garden.

Lest my view of myself seem prejudiced, I should mention that I have seen other cats who have demonstrated the consequences of an opposite appreciation of the realities of existence. There was a kitten brought to the house next door as a fourth-year birthday present to one of the brats who lived there. I knew as soon as I met her that the kitten was handicapped because she had been purchased. The humans had actually paid money for her, which meant that she was pampered, spoiled, and ruined for any serious dealings with life. Throughout her early months she was constantly coaxed with tasty tidbits that made her overweight and, more important, dependent on her people, so that instead of training them, she was trained by them. She soon learned to come when she was called, and not just for dinner but whenever they wanted to play with her, which was often. And the playing was counterproductive. It did not teach her any useful skills. Chasing the end of a rope, for example, can be good for a kitten. It hones the reactions and develops speedy paw work, but if extended for too long a period it becomes an end in itself. The kitten becomes an excellent chaser of rope ends, but doesn't know how to break the neck of a rat as big as she is. And a rope end lacks teeth, thus failing to provide instruction in self-protection.

The kitten next door was also; handicapped by the sheer volume of playing time. That went on and on and on, never allowing an opportunity for the contemplation that is so necessary to the development of a sensible cat. She would drop exhausted onto the chair--she had her own chair--only to be disturbed by someone in the family who wanted to show her off or to pamper her some more. The result was that she developed human biorhythms. She used to sleep all night, a practice unheard of in feline circles, because that was the only time her people would leave her alone.

She certainly developed into an attractive young queen and I confess I was looking forward to her first season with a good deal of anticipation which was not only sexual. I assumed the experience would drive some sense into her head. There is nothing like motherhood to straighten out a flighty kitten. Unfortunately, it was not to be. She came into the street one day, all fluffy and preening, a senseless beauty who was used to the unqualified admiration of all and who depended on that admiration for her sense of self, and she started to play, actually play with a great slobbering pup who chanced to be passing by. It must have seemed perfectly natural to her at first. She jumped at him, all

fluffed up in imitation ferocity, and he hopped back, laid his chin on the ground and held his tail up in the air, wagging away. She charged again, while he retreated again. Soon she was enjoying herself immensely, attacking the brute and obviously believing that she was doing great things.

She grew bored with the game after a while and tried to walk away, but the pup would not let her. He wanted to continue.

The more senseless a game is, the longer a dog will want to play it. He nudged her with his nose, knocked her over, and playfully hit her on the neck, practically drowning her in slobber as he did so. That was when she should have extended four sets of claws and cut his face off. Instead she squealed and tried to squirm free which made the game so much more fun for the mutt. In less time than it takes to tell she was crying out in earnest, not hurt but scared, and the pup was growling with great ferocity and knocking her a over the place. When some other dogs heard the racket, they came running up, joined in the merriment, and in a spirit good clean fun and joyful abandonment, the four of them tore her to pieces.

There was wailing and gnashing of teeth when the carcass und that afternoon. The little girl r s brothers threw stones at several passing dogs, none of which had been involved in the fracas. The father buried the remains in the garden and set up a cross and that was the end of that. No one had learned anything. The kitten was beyond education, the family reflected on the carelessness of people who did not look after their dogs, and the mutts themselves labored under the delusion that they, individuals, could conquer cats was a misapprehension of which they were speedily disabused when one of them came into my yard and left hurriedly, badly cut about the cheeks and minus the best part of one eye. I was planning to get the other eye, but its owner ran under a bus a short time later. The lesson to be drawn from the affair was obvious. If that kitten had had the least sense of her own worth, she would never have permitted her people to bring her up as a helpless toy. She would have known what she was and would never have allowed that mutt even to think she would play with anything so inferior. The worst part was that she had only to glance across her yard to see how a cat should behave. There I was, a living example to be followed. It was no use my taking the initiative and telling her to comport herself in a fitting manner. Such lectures are never effective. Nor would my intervention have helped when she started to play with the mutt. It would have been a simple matter for me to have hopped over the fence and €chopped up the pup a bit before the game got out of hand, but it would not have taught her anything and, besides, it would have been a contravention of good feline behavior. Cats do not herd. Only rarely do we so much as cooperate with each other. When circumstances throw us together in groups or even colonies, we are in competition with each other and never present a united front. Even in the wild our degenerate relations, lions, who have lost whatever intelligence they may have had through easy living and brutish habits, only form loose connections which appear to human eyes as compact groups, but which are in fact the most tenuous of unions. No, the essence of cat-like behavior is the individuality of the cat himself. Any compromise immediately results in weakness and can lead only to trouble.

I lived in Frankfurt which is in the Orange Free State for about four years and became, I must state in all modesty, a truly magnificent specimen. I was about average in size and no quicker than most of the cats I came in contact with, but I learned very early that natural talents, while valuable, are nothing compared to a firmly entrenched mental

attitude. Often in my nightly cruising I would meet a Tom who was a bigger, tougher, and more experienced scrapper than I, but I never lost a fight. I suppose a definition is in order here. "Losing" a fight has nothing to do with the amount of damage sustained or inflicted. Losing is being forced to withdraw and usually entails an admission that your adversary is the better cat, an admission I was never willing to make. Of course, the ultimate withdrawal is death, but that is very rare among cats. A fight to the finish requires opponents of exceptional fiber. The odds against two cats of my caliber being pitted against each other are astronomical, especially when you consider the difficulties of finding two such paragons in the same place at the same time. I suppose that is what accounts for my unbroken string of victories. I was willing to battle on to the end, but my adversaries were not.

My early encounters were, of course, the most difficult. I had to gain experience and foster a reputation in the neighborhood. Breaking into an established circle is always the hardest part of the game. Often I would return home in the early morning hours badly cut and it would be all I could manage to force myself out again in the evening to consolidate my victory. But I always did so because I knew that admitting that I was hurt meant acknowledging the power of another cat and that was unthinkable.

Injuries were often useful, too. The only time I had doubts about myself was when I met a scarred up old Tom who appeared as though he never let a day go by without a fight. Just looking at him was enough to put the fear of God into a potential enemy. His face had been sliced a hundred times and his tail had a permanent crook in it. He was missing one fang, which meant he was a biter, but the other was there and ready for use. I knew when I went after him that I was in for a hard time, and I was right, but I hung in there out of desperation and, after a long battle, forced him to retreat. By studying my reactions to his scars I was able to appreciate the effect mine would have on other cats, and therefore I never regretted a cut that healed in a nicely visible scar.

The most effective wound I ever received I got from a youngster who accidentally caught his claw in my ear. It was really comical because he did not truly want to fight and only took a swipe at me on his way out the door, so to speak. He was practically running away before I got to him and he reached out and hit at me blindly with his eyes tightly closed. Somehow his claw punctured the skin of my ear and was caught there for a second or two, so I had time to slice him up pretty well before he pulled loose and ran off howling. The ear was torn, but not painful, and when it healed, it took on a bent shape that was not only distinctive but was also a highly visible sign to all potential aggressors that I had been around and was not to be fooled with. That youngster with the lucky swipe probably saved me the trouble of dozens of fights.

I was also in his debt, I suppose, because my ear made me more attractive to females than I might otherwise have been. Not that it made too much of a difference, really. I could have all the queens I wanted anyway, whether they liked it or not, but it seemed that I did not have to work so hard at it. All that tearing around after a silly slip of a girl in a flirtatious mood was fun when I was a careless youth, but as a mature Tom I found it a bore. With the necessity for extra effort no longer there, I was able to catch and cover more queens in an evening than was possible before. Instead of merely hundreds of off-spring, I fathered thousands, many of whom demonstrated a gratifying affinity to me in appearance as well as outlook.

After four years, my life was seriously disrupted when my people decided to

move. That was one hell of a shock to me. I had spent my early youth and young manhood establishing a place for myself in my environment. I knew every inch of my world--all the safe places and all the dangerous ones; where the winter sun stayed the longest and where the summer shade lasted the day through. I knew about every mouse, rat, bird, and snake that existed, because I let them, in my neighborhood, and had established a satisfactory relationship with every Tom or queen within a two-hour cruise. The dog population was subject to my will, and so was the human. The sounds of the day and night, as well as the smells, were familiar. I was, in short, in full control and then, suddenly, there was packing and planning and I was to be moved.

No cat likes to be moved. Some have even been known to return, over great distances, to their original homes. They were frightened in their new locations and resented the entire process of resettlement. I did not like the idea of heir shifted, but I reflected that my nature was immutably fixed. I was, after all, me, and nothing could change that. I would have to work hard to re-establish myself. There would be dogs and cats to educate and surroundings to explore and master, but the most important thing, my view of myself, would be carried with us like part of the furniture.

CHAPTER II

We moved from Frankfurt in the Orange Free State to a place called Hermanus which is in the Cape Province of South Africa. The trip itself was very traumatic for me from the beginning. First of all, there was a week of confusion and chaos during which things were put in boxes. That was pretty hard to take--watching my environment disintegrate. The pile of old newspapers on which I was accustomed to nap during the mornings disappeared with a rapidity that was alarming as cups, saucers, plates, glasses, and anything that would break easily were wrapped up and packed away. The carpet I used to stretch my claws on was rolled up and tied in a tight sausage. The spare room, which I frequented when in search of some peace and quiet, was piled with boxes and suitcases. And, worst of all, everyone was too busy running around to pay any attention to me. Oh, they fed me as usual, and kept my water dish full, but what happened to my daily brushing? Where were the expressions of affection I was entitled to? In short, what right had they to so far forget themselves as to neglect their duties to me? I grew so angry with them that I determined to show them a thing or two. I went into the spare room and pissed on one of the boxes.

Secondly there was the misunderstanding on the morning of our departure. A big truck arrived at the door and some strange, smelly men began taking the furniture and boxes out and loading them on the truck with a carelessness that clearly indicated they were not handling their own belongings. One of them nearly stepped on me, so I gave him a swipe across the ankles and was highly gratified to hear the commotion he set up. He was a huge fellow, capable of lifting the piano by himself, and he carried on as if I had taken off his leg. All loading stopped as he showed his wound to his co-workers and there was a great deal of tongue clicking and expressions of sympathy coupled with some heavy looks at Daddy, which I thought was unfair. Why should he get the credit for my efforts? Eventually somebody painted the idiot's leg with antiseptic, which did no good at all. He still seemed unable to walk without a pronounced limp, but then Daddy gave him some money which effected a marvelous cure. By that time I had removed myself to the spare room where I climbed into a wardrobe and curled up on a purse that had been left there. There is no sense in pushing your luck. If I had stayed in the open, that big bugger might really have stepped on me. Probably on purpose.

I was just dozing off, when the door to the wardrobe was slammed shut, locked, and the whole thing tipped on its side. I was thrown about and very alarmed, because I was obviously being moved. I could feel the motion as the wardrobe was eased around corners and through doorways. No cat likes to be carried at all, and to be carried inside a pitch black wardrobe has nothing to recommend it. I was bashed against the sides, the bottom, even the top, and there was nothing to hold on to but slippery hard wood that splintered when I tried to sink my claws into it. At one point I was tempted to give out a few howls of protest, a practice I generally abhor, except when confronting other Toms, because it is undignified. With all the racket going on outside the wardrobe, probably nobody would have heard me.

But then the motion stopped. I was still not happy. I did not know where I was, which is a situation to be avoided at all costs. One of the basic principles of survival is a thorough knowledge of your surroundings which is impossible if you have no starting point. I tried to sniff around the edges, but that wardrobe was one of those old pieces of

furniture too well-made to allow any air through. Even the sounds of the moving were so muffled when they reached me as to give no indication of direction. After exhausting all possibilities of escape, and myself as well, I decided to have a nap and curled up on the purse. I was there for a very long time. Just how long could be deduced by anybody able to figure out how long it would take for a cat of my build to breathe up most of the air in the space available.

I awoke, feeling decidedly off-color and lethargic, to the sounds of someone desperately trying to open the door of my cell. "Aha," I said to myself. "They have finally missed me and are trying to get me out of here." This just shows how wrong one can be about people. In my trusting good nature I assumed they were looking for me, but in fact they were after the purse I was sitting on, which contained the meager sum of eleven rands. Ouma had locked it in the wardrobe to keep it out of the hands of the removal crew, To be doubly sure of its safety, she had put the keys in another locked drawer in a bureau that had been one of the first items loaded and was now at the front of the van behind six feet of tightly packed furniture and boxes. To add to the complications, the key to the drawer was, to put its position in the universe precisely, somewhere else. All they had to do to get the purse was to unpack the van, search all the boxes for Ouma's grey coat, look in the pockets of that garment for the keys to open the drawer to find the keys to open the wardrobe. Then re-pack the van. Or was it the black coat? Or they could take off the back of the wardrobe and pull out the purse, which is what finally occurred. A corner of the plywood backing was pried loose. A hand reached in to feel around for the purse, found me, and then it was "Why, Chris! What are you doing in there!" It was simply outrageous. The fools had not even missed me and it was a combination of Ouma's ridiculous concern about her eleven rands and pure luck that prevented my demise in the prime of life. I reflected that it would have served them right.

Thirdly, the trip itself was exhausting. Cars are strange contraptions. Naturally I had seen them rattling around Frankfurt and had often explored the one that lived with us. It was full of weird smells and in winter I often enjoyed a very pleasant sit on the hood when the machine had been away and came back all warm. But I had never ridden in one until that moving day. Our car was a station wagon. In the space behind the seats it was loaded to the roof with a TV set and lots of suitcases. In the back seat were Ouma, with her blanket, pillow, the famous purse, and a bottle of luke-warm coffee; Karin, with three books and a monopoly game; and Philip, with a cage containing a hamster that I had been trying to get at for weeks. In the front were Lampie with a basket of food for the road, two bottles of water, one sweater, her pillow, and a road map covering an area we were not going, to be in, and Fatso-Daddy with his tool box that had to be ready if we had a breakdown, but which struck me as unwarranted because he had never yet been able to fix anything that went wrong with the car. Into that confusing mess they injected me without ceremony, slammed' the doors, and started the engine, which scared the hell out of me. I ran about as much as the tightly packed mass of belongings would allow, trying to get away from the noise, but the windows were all rolled up and there was no escape.

It took me a good half hour to get used to the noise and the movement and I was never fully at ease. I tried to find a secure nook to curl up in and explored the spaces between the baggage in back, but Ouma started screaming about a hat in a plastic bag that I inadvertently sat on and Philip had to pull me out of there. There was no room for me on anybody's lap and the area on the floor was full of feet that kept kicking me, so I sat

on back to the seat behind Fatso's neck and steadied myself on the curves by touching him lightly on the shoulder until I happened to hold on a little too tightly and scratched him through his shirt. I don't know what all the fuss was about. It was, after all, an accident and there was hardly any blood at all, but he became most upset and I was pushed roughly off my perch. I found a comfortable position between Daddy's feet under the brake pedal and was almost squashed when we went down a hill. I had a few moments on Lampie's lap until she put the food basket on top of me when she was trying to dig out a sandwich for Karin.

Actually, I was on the move for the entire trip. There just was not a satisfactory position for me in the car. I was shunted all about without consideration for my dignity or my comfort. If I had not exercised self-control, I would have been thoroughly disgusted with all of them, especially the hamster, who had all the room he needed in his cage and who spent at least half the trip running idiotically around on his wheel or carrying huge cheek-loads of seeds from corner to another. As it was, I was thoroughly angry when we arrived in Hermanus and I went off to sulk for two days and only returned when the children had spent every spare minute searching for me and calling for me all over the neighborhood. I gave them enough time to learn how important I was to their lives and then forgave them. Besides, I was getting hungry.

My first impressions of the little town were positive. The house we lived in was initially fascinating. It was surrounded by a proper lawn, not one of your close-cropped putting greens, but a deep, rich area of grass a couple of feet high, in which were to be found numerous examples of the local fauna, including three mice and one snake, all of whom I eventually dispatched when they had afforded me the maximum interest of which they were capable. Indoors there were plenty of new smells and some nice piles of muck that had been there for several months, all of which required thorough investigation. It was an airy house, until Fatso spoiled everything and put new glass in the windows, and contained an especially thoughtful feature, a drip under the sink in the bathroom that gave me a puddle of fresh water every day, all day, until old skin-head ruined that, too. In fact, they all made a concerted effort to mess up that place as rapidly as they could.

They swept, repaired, washed and scrubbed, dusted and polished, and pretty soon the house was as dull and ordinary as a hospital. I was disconcerted until I realized that it was only a matter of time until things returned to normal. Sitting under the couch in the living room and looking at a floor so clean it appeared sterile, it suddenly occurred to me that the dust would soon collect there as it had in the last place; the furniture would regain the bugs and bits of food, like the half-sandwich that had been discovered when the movers up-ended the big chair; and the television set would soon hatch out the insects that had hidden in there where it was warm. I resolved to be as patient as I could and to help things along wherever possible. I went outside and caught a huge grasshopper which I hid in a corner, and, sure enough, within two days there was a whole army of ants trooping through the room. They attracted the lizards who, in turn, made their own contribution to restoring the natural life of the home. Even mowing the lawn did not result in a complete catastrophe. The large pile of grass cuttings was put in a corner to become compost and that developed into a nature reserve of its own. I had lost one good hunting ground, but gained another.

One of the best things about Hermanus was its air, and that not even my family could destroy. Our life in Frankfurt in the Orange Free State had been in a farming

community and farms, while full of interest, are really very, dirty places because they are full of machinery. The natural smells are overcome by the odors of fuels and exhaust fumes and there are only moments, say after it has been raining all night, when one is aware of life on a farm. But Hermanus is by the sea and there is a steady breeze that disperses the fumes of the cars and brings with it the delicious aroma of fish and crabs and mussels and seaweed, especially at low tide. And there is always the sound of surf breaking against the cliffs, which is very soothing to a contemplative cat. Sometimes, when the fishing is good, the entire atmosphere intensifies. There is a constant scurrying of people toward the little harbor and a hectic rushing about with bags of fish to be cleaned and frozen. Then the aroma will permeate the village and the excitement will be contagious because when the fish come in, everybody benefits. Some of the most enjoyable moments of my life have been spent cleaning the last bits of meat off the bones of a snook that had been filleted for the freezer.

Settling myself into the life of Hermanus was easier than I had anticipated. It soon became abundantly clear to me that this environment was far less hostile than the one I had just left. There were no horses, for example, to step on one while one was in an unguarded moment, which, of course, I never was. Much of the traffic was bicycle and was easy to dodge, and the cars were driven so slowly that even they presented no problem.

The dogs were ridiculous. At least half of them were owned by little old ladies and had become little old dogs in their own right. Overweight and pampered, they waddled about behind their owners and were incapable of more than a yap or two in the direst of emergencies. I did not even bother to educate them. The remainder were so disciplined and so restricted that they did not know when to bark or when to wag. Tied up in a fenced-off back yard and told to shut up every time they made noises, they were nonetheless expected to look after the property of their masters. Most of these dogs were nuts, or at least halfway "round the bend," and I did my best to complete the process. I used to wander into a back yard at night and sit cleaning myself some twelve feet away from a huge mutt on a ten-foot rope. When he was thoroughly hysterical, I would be gone like a shadow and his boss would come out in a dressing gown, obviously brought from a warm bed by the racket, and beat the hell out of the noisy barker. That system was especially effective on wet nights.

The cats in the neighborhood presented no problems either. There were a few strays who lived in and around the church in the center of town, too far from me to constitute any kind of a threat, and the ones close by became very friendly after I had thumped the reigning Tom and taken over his harem. Strays, incidentally, are the ones to look out for when you move into a new area. That is because they are unpredictable. A cat with an established home of his own knows where he belongs and lets you know it too, but a stray is always trying to make a place for himself and is always on the defensive. Also, because of the way he lives, you never know how effective a fighter he is. He may be keened by tough usage, or toughened by it, and it is hard to tell unless you actually test him out. As a general rule, I'd say that strays present an exaggerated picture of the cat world: the tough ones will be very tough and the weak ones beneath contempt. But even the tough ones are at a disadvantage because they have to spend so much time finding food that they have very little left to devote to contemplation, and that causes a moral deficiency that makes them vulnerable to attack from someone like me who knows

he is superior. Say what you will, it is spirit that wiz-Vs battles and spirit can only be attained through a pondering of the mysteries of life and an awareness of one's place in the universe.

On the whole, then, it was a satisfactory move. My life went on as usual, which is, after all, the only thing that counts. Change and variety are all well and good, but it is routine that develops sensitivity and hones the awareness, as even the most flighty of beings knows. One simply cannot do without a system for living. Even if that system becomes hectic chaos, it remains a system and, like my immutable nature, will be carried from place to place. The hard part is to impose the kind of system you can be comfortable with and luckily I was able to do so without too much effort. Then, after several months, the white cat came and upset everything.

The white cat was a weirdo of the first order. In the first place, she was not really white, but rather a very light beige, except for her ears and tail, which were light tan. In the second place she had blue eyes, which was strange enough, but the oddest thing was that they looked at each other. Never before in my considerable experience had I encountered a cross-eyed cat of any color. And, thirdly, she was a loud mouth who never shut up. That was the most upsetting thing about her. One could get used to her ridiculous appearance, but the noise she made all tile time was inexcusable. Let anyone step toward the kitchen and she was howling for food. Should one of the children come through the front door and she was howling for a lap to sit on or to have her ears scratched. I have even seen her come into an empty room and start howling for company. She was, in short, always running off at the mouth. I suspect that is why she was brought to us. Her previous people obviously got fed up with all the noise. I, who would not howl even when tossed around in a wardrobe, was subjected to this cacophony daily.

Her name was Zuki and she came to us as a full-grown cat, in her prime, with all the bad habits of an unrestrained prima donna, constantly demanding attention, fussy about her food, and far too concerned about our people. That was her greatest mistake. She considered our people worth cultivating as beings to whom she owed something rather than the other way around, and that is what robbed her of her dignity. No matter what happened, it was always clear from her demeanor that the people could never be at fault. Should one of them accidentally step on her, she would never react in a sensible manner, as I did, and give the offending party a slight swipe to show that he was in the wrong and should be more careful. No. She would howl with pain and then, while he apologized, rub up against him and purr as though she were saying, "Sorry, I was in the way." It was disgusting to watch such behavior and, of course, the people took advantage of her. The children would carry her around upside-down, a position she and all cats hate, and she would do nothing but lie there like a limp rag and hope they did not drop her. Even if they pulled her tail she would not react otherwise than by showing more and more affection. I remember thinking to myself that she was very lucky to have come to a family that had been trained by an expert or she might have suffered some kind of serious damage.

Zuki was to affect my life in some important ways. The most immediate was when she came in season. Now, you might think it a good thing to have your own queen at home. It might seem to be a convenience that obviated the need to 'cruise and do battle with all the Toms in the field. That is not the case. It turned out to be the most exhausting period of my life. Not only did I have to cover her far more often than I would have a

queen in the field, but I also had to keep all the other Toms away, for even though they knew they would be in trouble if they invaded my territory, they could not help themselves. That is one of the facts of life that all the education in the world cannot overcome. Young Toms who would have fled if I looked at them under ordinary circumstances simply had to take a chance when they knew Zuki was there in heat, and so I was very busy driving them off. And she was such a twit about the whole affair, too. Unlike a sensible queen who wants covering, she did not go out and make herself available. She stayed at home, on my property, and allowed all to come to her. We had strange Toms howling on the walls and trying to get in the windows all through the nights of her season and often during the days. I can assure you that I had a hard time keeping them away.

What compounded the problem was that the people became annoyed. Reproduction is a messy business and while that is unimportant on the limb of a tree or under a fence, it does concern one when it takes place in a house. Before too days had passed, I had sprayed a dozen times on the carpet in the living room and in several other places as well. This brought shrieks of rage from Lampie, and Ouma was constantly dashing about with a rag to clean things up. I do not know how many times I was unceremoniously tossed outside without a thought about the problems I was facing. It was very upsetting to have to assume the responsibility for what was, in reality, Zuki's fault. They could have solved the problem easily by tossing her out, but they were too stupid to see that.

Things returned to normal when she finished her season, but the people were not prepared to undergo another such period and took me to a vet who performed a small operation and I was through with mating forever. I will be the first to admit that, had the idea been proposed to me beforehand, I would have resisted most strenuously. But I was not consulted. I took a ride in the car and came home a different cat and the strange thing is I feel no resentment but suspect that my life was improved.

As I insinuated, mating is an involuntary pastime among cats. There is a certain amount of pleasure to be derived, to be sure, but who needs the constant strain on one's nerves and physique that is an integral part of the business? And, because it is an involuntary reaction, mating interferes with the discipline I like to think I have imposed on my life. I would be the first to admit that in the days of my youth I was in less than full control of my actions when there was a ready queen in the area, and I do not doubt that I contravened many of the rules I had set for myself. Even as a mature cat, when Zuki was in her interesting state I found myself doing things that I knew I should not be doing. I look back with a sense of shame upon the time I broke off a fight with one Tom because another was getting close to her, and then had to break off that scrap because the first Tom was approaching again. I know I presented a figure deserving of ridicule running from one half finished fight to another, and my soul shudders at the memory. And, I blush to record it, I accepted several patently inferior meals because I was too busy and too much in need of sustenance to reject them with proper disdain. Even being thrown out of the house on several occasions did not dissuade me from returning at once, ignoring the indignity and failing to respond with the necessary hauteur to inform the people that they had done wrong. It was useless to tell myself that I was not to blame for my behavior, that I could not help myself. That was no more valid than when a drunk presents his intoxication as vindication for his actions. The fact remains that the deed was

done and the shame remains. The small operation did away with that and I can only believe that my life was improved by it.

Zuki had her kittens a short time after my operation and she proved to be as good a mother as could be expected of a queen without a brain in her head. Oh, she fed them and kept them clean, but she also spent a great deal of time howling for food and attention and I was afraid she would raise a bunch of loud-mouthed idiots like herself instead of self-contained individuals, like me. When I considered the way in which they were being raised, I privately determined that I would drive them all out of the house as soon as they were weaned, if they did not find homes for themselves. Luckily most of them looked like me and did not have Zuki's in sand coloring. There was not a blue eye in the bunch, thank God, and I assumed on that account that they would be welcome in some homes.

But then tragedy struck and my concern became superfluous. Somehow they all developed ringworm, a disease that attacks the coat in little circles that get bigger until there are lots of ugly bald spots all over whoever gets it. Fatso put them in a box and took them to the vet, but they did not come back. Only their mother returned and she was locked up in an outside room for two months so that she could not give the problem to me or to any of the other cats that came around. I think I can truthfully say that she howled, without more than a few breaks for sleep, for the entire two months. All the family was walking around saying, "Poor Zuki!" and "What a shame," and spending as much time as they could with her in the outside room. They brought her the most delectable goodies to eat, but she ignored most of them, which was typical of her stupidity but which turned out well for me because they came my way after she had rejected them. That was the only good aspect of the whole affair.

Aside from the constant din Zuki put up, driving me away from one of my favorite morning spots, we both had to be bathed with some disgusting soap once a week. The idea was to cure her and to prevent me from catching the disease, as if I would be so stupid, but it is indicative of the difference between us when I mention that Zuki came to her bath all purrs and contentment to be in a person's arms and out of the room in which she was a prisoner. She hated the smelly water as much as I did, but she never complained and would submit herself almost gratefully to be covered with suds and rinsed several times. The whole family would stand about and marvel at how "good" she was.

When it was my turn, they all had to lend a hand because I wasn't going to give in without a fight. I do not like to have to beat up my people and I will swim across a river if I have to or if there is something interesting on the other side, but I will not be placed willingly in a tub of soapy water. First I gave Fatso a good scratch across the knuckles, then I bit Ouma when she tried to hold me, and finally I splashed half the water out of the tub when I was held by both legs and my neck and could do nothing but squirm. It took three of them to hold me and another to do the washing, which should indicate the odds I was up against.

And it was all futility. I did not have the disease, and I was not going to get it, but it is typical of people to take a lot of trouble over unnecessary things. Half of what they do has no basis in the realities of life and is simply the result of groundless fears about what might or could occur. The other half is undertaken in such a blind unawareness of what is dangerous that I am surprised the human race has lasted as long as it has. They

will carry an umbrella on a bright, clear day and then get into a tub full of warm water on the coldest night. They recoil in disgust from a piece of meat with a few flies on it and gobble up with relish some funk that comes out of a tin which I can tell with one sniff is full of odd poisons that have no business there. They sit around for years to build up some fat and then go out and run it off for no other purpose than to promote a heart attack. Sometimes they are so contradictory that there is no way to explain them. Once when Lampie almost stepped on a mouse in the kitchen she set up such a racket you'd have thought she'd caught a tender part of her anatomy in the mincing machine. When I caught the little fellow and brought it to show her that she needn't worry about it any more, she took one look and started all over again, even though it was dead and harmless.

When she was cured, Zuki went to the vet, too, and had her operation. There were to be no more kittens in our house, a fact that seemed to give the family a good deal of comfort. It did not make any difference to me, except in the positive sense. I would not have been concerned about Zuki if she had had another season, but I would have been very much involved if she had attracted other cats that I would have had to drive off. Her operation relieved me of that responsibility and I was able to view the future with equanimity. It did occur to me that the family could have solved the problem of indoor mating if they had simply spayed her and left me alone, but I saw that as merely another example of the human propensity for complication and was not resentful. I was living a very good life.

I got my breakfast early in the morning from Ouma, who lived in her own little apartment in the back yard. She was always up early making herself a cup of tea and she seemed to like making something for me as well. The only problem was that she took ages. You can imagine my impatience as I sat in front of the door to her mini-kitchen, waiting for my food while she went through the ritual of making that cup of tea. First there was the electric kettle. This had to be filled just enough to boil exactly one cup of water. More and she would be wasting both water and electricity. But kettles like to be filled above a certain level before they will boil efficiently and Ouma's one cup did not reach that level so the thing hissed and sputtered and took three times as long to get hot as it should have. That did not bother Ouma because she was too deaf to hear the hissing and sputtering. Besides, she was making too much noise with the cups to hear anything even if she had not been deaf. She required three cups to make a single one of tea. First there was the enamel cup, an old, chipped tin container that was twice my age and contained the half tea bag she was going to use that morning. The bag was usually pretty soggy because she had already gotten a couple of brews out of it. Ouma got a lot of mileage from a tea bag, but it was part of the system. Then there was the cup in which the tea was to be made. This was a china cup without an ear but with a large chip on the rim. It was necessary because the tea bag had been cut in half and always dribbled some leaves out into the tea, an undesirable addition to the brew. And thirdly, there was the cup from which the tea, when brewed, would be imbibed. This was also a china cup, but it was distinguishable from the other by having an ear and no chip on the rim. Instead it had a crack down the side that hardly leaked at all.

All these were set up on the table with plenty of crash-bang and much re-arranging. One and a half teaspoons of sugar were deposited in cup number three, in the fridge was an old plastic yogurt container that had been half-filled with milk two or three days before and a dash of this was tossed into the sugar in the cup, providing that the

milk had not turned too sour because the door of the fridge had been left open. If the kettle had been plugged in, it was, perhaps, steaming by this time. Then precisely three-quarters of an inch of water was splashed into cup number two, to "warm the pot." It was allowed to do this for about three minutes while the water in the kettle sounded like a volcano because it was barely touching the element and was heating largely by convection. When Ouma was convinced that the water was boiling, the three-quarters of an inch used for pot-warming was returned to the kettle to make up the full cup. The half-tea bag was placed in cup number two, and the water added. The amount of time necessary for "drawing" depended on how many times the bag had been used already, but it never took less than two minutes. Then the final product was strained into cup number three, the tea bag, if there was still any color to it, was returned to cup number one, and, voila! we had our morning tea. All the while I was waiting with mounting impatience at the door, but there was nothing I could do to hasten the process. I firmly believe that if the bedroom had been on fire, no alarm would have been sounded until that cup of tea had been made and consumed.

What Ouma made for me in those days was usually pretty good. I lived basically on a stew she made up from scraps she scrounged from the fish shop down the road. Either Lampie or Fatso would bring home a package of bones left over when the fish had been filleted, and these were Ouma's stock in trade. She would boil them up and add old bread until she had a mess that smelled delicious, especially after the first boiling. There were always bits of meat remaining and plenty of gelatin and I enjoyed my meals immensely. But, if there were a lot of bones, the stew would be too much for one, two, or three meals and the remainder would be saved for the next time. The second boiling was always inferior to the first and the third was usually barely edible. By the fourth or fifth day the stew would be very ripe and I would have to reject it. Then Ouma would run over to the house and tell everybody that I was sick because I wouldn't eat.

In addition to generally satisfactory nourishment for me, two other results emerged from Ouma's preparation of my meals. The first was that her apartment developed an odor of its own, thanks to the fish she was constantly boiling on the stove. One of my fondest memories will always be of strolling in through the gate by the driveway and encountering that lovely, pungent aroma from fifty feet away. The manner in which it strengthened as I approached the back yard until it reached its peak in a mouth-watering cloud of fishy vapor that enveloped the entire apartment was a tantalizing hint of the nature of heaven. Even after a full meal, it was a pleasure to lie near Ouma's flatlet and enjoy the perfume that never really dispersed, not even if she hadn't been cooking fish that day. I have been away from Hermanus for a long time, but I would have no qualms in asserting that the little apartment still smells of fish, so thorough was the permeation.

The second result was a running battle between Ouma and Fatso about the expenses involved in keeping cats. The problem was that Zuki would not eat fish stew, ever when it was fresh. She insisted on having red meat, and would starve before she ate anything else. It was one of those cases where the right thing was done for the wrong reasons. I would be the first to reject food if I considered its quality or preparation reflected an indifference to my importance, but Zuki refused it because she did not like it, which is a stupid reason. Nourishment is nourishment, and fussiness is fussiness, and the latter should never preclude the former. As an example of how ridiculous she was, to take

the time she caught a dove and brought it into the house to show off to the family. Although she is very quick in her movements, being cross-eyed means that she doesn't see too well, so it must have been a mentally retarded dove, but a dove nonetheless. Zuki carried it into the kitchen only half dead and batted it around until it kicked off and then she left it lying there, which is against the feline code. What we catch, we eat. But not her. In the end, I ate the bird, just to show Zuki her duty.

Iliac se she would eat nothing but red meat, raw, Lampie had a whole freezer full of chicken gizzards, and Fatso would dole them out to Zuki twice a day, after cutting them up into bite-sized chunks. Ouma insisted that the gizzards were far too expensive and Fatso argued that anybody who kept the stove going for two hours every day to make a stink that was causing a deprecation in real estate values in the neighborhood had no right to talk about expensive. Personally, I thought both of them were theft heads. Nothing is too expensive for a cat and the idea of calling Ouma's aroma a stink merely underscores a defective upbringing. Fortunately they reached a deadlock and no changes were made.

Ouma continued to boil my stew and Zuki continued to chew up most of the raw gizzards she was given. I say "most" because I usually got a few of them when nobody was looking. After Ouma fed me early in the morning, I would wait around until Fatso got up to make breakfast for the family. He always gave Zuki her scoff while he was frying the eggs. I would be in through the back door while he was busy at the stove, push the white cat out of the way, and gobble up whatever remained in her plate. Sometimes I would get shouted at and thrown outside and sometimes the door would be closed, but that made no difference. I could always trot around the house and come in through a window that was left open for our use, so I was pretty sure to get at least half of Zuki's ration. I was living very well at Hermanus.

During the days I sat around outside, keeping an eye on things and enjoying the sun when there was any. That was one thing about Hermanus; there was a greater variety of weather than we had in Frankfurt in the Orange Free State. There it was hot and dry in the summer and cold and dry in the winter. Hermanus had cold, wet winters. The wind would blow and rain would pour down, turning the back yard into a lake and I would sit on top of the car in the carport and watch the deluge. During the summer, when it was dry, I would find a sheltered corner and lie in the sun and enjoy the contrast. When Fatso brought me my log, my days became even more pleasant.

Because of the cold, the family always had a fire in the winter evenings. They would get it going just before sundown and sit around it watching television until they went to bed. I joined them on rare occasions when I felt they needed me, but most of the time I found it too hot and too noisy with the box blaring away. Of course the white cat was always there, sitting on a lap and generally demonstrating a shameful dependence on the people. She had no pride. I enjoyed the fire only after the people had gone to bed. Then the heat was less intense, the TV was off, and peace was established as the coals died quietly.

To build up a supply of fuel for the fire, Fatso used to go out in the car every once in a while and bring home a tree he found somewhere. It would come in six-foot lengths which he would cut up and split so that the pieces would fit in the fireplace. It seemed like an awful lot of work to me and hardly worth the effort. Why spend hours sawing away at logs that will be turned into ashes when it is easier and healthier to curl up in a

ball and let the weather do what it will' But that i part of being a human. Always complicate things. People seem to think that as long as they are working like mad, they are doing something worthwhile, improving the universe, when, in fact, they are usually messing up a satisfactory situation.

Fatso's firewood detail was typical. When he had sawed up the tree, he had to split the logs and he used an ax to do so, smashing it into the log as hard as he could and then bashing it against the cement driveway until the log broke in two. Not only did this make the logs burn faster than they would have normally, forcing to go out and get more trees, but the repeated hammering against the driveway eventually cracked the cement and he had to spend additional times repairing that. And all for a fire in the evenings, to warm up the one room in the house they would vacate just when the temperature was comfortable. Fatso stopped splitting logs on the driveway only after he had cracked it thoroughly, which is also typical. I could have told him he was going to crack it before he started, and even he should have noticed the damage he was doing after the first few logs, but he just kept on hashing away until there was a great hole where there had been cement. Then it was, "Oh dear me. I seem to have damaged the driveway," as if that was the most incomprehensible accident ever. The result of all this was that he went out in the car and brought home a great hunk of tree about a yard long and two feet in diameter. This was to be his chopping block and save the wear and tear on the driveway. It was a beautiful log, covered with a rough bark that was perfect for scratching and stretching my claws, and just the right height when upended to give me a perch that provided a good view of my surroundings. It was placed in a sunny, sheltered spot, too, and that made it the ideal resting place. I spent hundreds of hours sitting on top of that log, so many that the children began to call it "Chris's log," and always knew where to find me when they had problems to discuss. They even brought their friends along to show me off, which usually produced a good deal of hilarity at my expense. They said I looked like a vulture waiting for Carrion, but that was of little concern to me. I knew what I was doing, even if they didn't, and they were good enough kids in most respects.

In their ignorance they, and other people too, would often find something amusing about me. Because of my operation, and the attendant lack of exercise (remember, I was no longer driven to cruising at night), I put on a trifle of weight which I thought was very becoming and which they found most comical. It just shows you how a difference in point of view can affect reality. There I was, in the prime of life, becoming a more impressive specimen every day, an object of dread to any Tom who inadvertently came into my territory, and filled with the wisdom engendered by years of contemplation, and they called me a "furry rugby ball." Had I been less sure of myself, less aware of what I was, I might have been hurt by their remarks. But I had not gone through the years blindly and was hence immune to their ridicule. I sat on my log and ignored them. If I wanted to go anywhere, I would walk with dignity, and that too amused them. "Chris never runs," they would say, or, 'Look at Chris tearing along at full speed," when I was strolling over to wait for my dinner. I remained aloof and unaffected and let them have their fun. They would learn as they grew older that all the rushing about, the dashing here and there, was just so much nonsense and merely demonstrated that they had not, learned what life was all about. I could run as fast as any of them if I wanted to, but I didn't want to.

We stayed in Hermanus for about four years before I noticed the signs that meant

we were moving again. It began slowly at first. A box or two would be brought out and a few things thrown in. Some of the furniture was sold. There were many conferences about airplanes and taxis and tickets. Strange people began to come to the house and walk away with things that had no earthly value at prices I am sure were inflated.

A sign went up by the front gate, offering the place for sale and lots of odd looking characters wandered through the rooms pretending they knew what they were doing. They would glance at a crack in the wall of the bedroom and say, "Aha, there is a crack in the wall of the bedroom!" completely overlooking the fact that they were standing on a bit of floor that was about to rot away completely. "Needs a bit of paint," they would say, looking at the place on the bathroom wall that was subject to damp and would never hold paint. "How's the wiring" they would ask, looking at the conduit that had been installed shortly before the end of World War II. And Fatso would say, "Just fine." It wasn't that the place was falling apart. It was just that they did not know I knew. I, after all, had been all over that house. I had examined every corner on the day we moved in and had inspected everything at periodic intervals ever since. There was nothing wrong with the place that I didn't know about, but do you think they would consult with me? Not a chance. They wandered around uttering what they thought were expressions of profound acuity and missed everything important.

The pace speeded up as the time went by and I could tell the move was imminent, but what puzzled me was that it appeared that almost everything was being sold. What were we going to use when we got to wherever we were going? More important, what was going to happen to my log? I remember thinking that it would be just like them to leave it standing there in the back yard when we drove off to some godforsaken place. Suppose we went to some locality where there were no logs! How would they replace it for me? I can tell you it was a worrying time for me until I considered that the log, however comfortable, was only a thing, a material possession that had no effect on my estimation of myself. After that realization came to me, I was able to view the move with equanimity. Do what they would, I would be all right.

The day came when I noticed Fatso loading up the car with all sorts of useless junk he had been keeping for no good purpose. There were a couple of fancy radios that were rarely used at home – one you could talk on and be heard far away – some delicate instruments that I had never seen the use of, lots of books, half the remaining pots and pans from the kitchen, a few boxes of tinned food, all his clothing, all the sleeping bags in the house, a few pillows and blankets – in short, an odd selection of items that had been standing around for ages, taking up space. It is amazing how many things a human considers necessary to life. Here I was, perfectly happy with my bowl and my log. Those were the only possessions I needed and even they were things I could do without small luxuries that happened to be there and for which I had purposeful uses. But humans exaggerate everything. They have a legitimate need for shelter and clothing, but the former becomes a warehouse for all that can be accumulated, and the latter a collection with changes for almost every activity that can be undertaken. The end result is that the possessions take over and the person spends his life taking care of them, rather than being helped by them. The most astonishing aspect of the whole situation is that even the example I presented them did not change matters.

Then the car was loaded with six boxes full of junk, and they were big boxes, the spaces left over were crammed with even more. Phlop and Rink squeezed into the front

seat and Fatso came over to where I was kitting on my log. Since there was obviously no more room for anyone in the car, I had thought that they were just going out for a while and that he was coming over to give me a pat. You can imagine my surprise when he picked me up and tossed me into the car. There was no notice of what was to take place, no feeling for my sense of dignity, no thought whatsoever as to my readiness to accompany them. I was put in a car with the windows up, crowded by people and things, and told that we were going to Cape Town, wherever that was. I remember looking out through a small corner of the rear window past Ouma and Lampie who were waving goodbye as the car pulled away. I remember Rink saying, "Look at Chris: He's saying goodbye to Ouma and Mommy." The obtuseness of her remark almost made me sick. I was saying goodbye to my log.

CHAPTER. III

My impressions of Cape Town are, I am afraid, somewhat limited. When people are concerned with their own affairs, they are likely to forget anything that does not apply immediately to them. Hence there was no effort made to show me the sights of what South Africans call the "Mother City," There was not even an indication that my curiosity about the city needed to be taken into account. My people simply drove to where they were going and never for a moment considered any inclination I might have had. Because of this, my idea of Cape Town is restricted to a small area in the docks called the yacht basin. I had a view of Table Mountain, which is a large flat lump of sandstone that dominates the city, and I had a vague impression that there was a good deal of activity off in the distance, but aside from that my horizon was limited. We drove to a very dirty slab of concrete and everybody climbed out of the car with many injunctions not to let me run away- 'Be careful Chris doesn't dash off!'--which was more silliness when you consider that I had long given up running and hadn't dashed anywhere in years. I was picked up by Fatso, carried over some rusty old pipes that had been sitting in a corner of the quay for years, and taken up a short flight of steps to yet another concrete slab crowded with junk that was covered with oil and grime. The whole place was a bowl of discarded equipment covered with a sticky, greasy layer of muck that stank of oil. It was the dirtiest place I gave ever seen in a well-traveled life.

At the edge of the slab was the top end of a ladder sticking up and it was to this that I was carried, held tightly as though I were just waiting for a chance to leap into a large puddle of oil and water that we had to skirt. When we reached the ladder, I began to think that it might be a good idea to jump into the puddle after all. For there beneath me, some eight feet down, was a boat and I discovered that it was Fatso's intention to carry me down the ladder and put me on the boat. It was a shock, I can tell you. I had spent the best years of my life trying to instill into the mind of that man some knowledge about cats and about me in particular, and here he was proposing not only to carry me down a ladder that appeared to be as stable as a two-legged chair but to place me on a boat surrounded by water. And there was a good chance that he would drop me on the way and I would fail not onto the boat, but into the water. That was enough for me.

Before he could put a foot on the ladder, all sets of claws were out and working and if he hadn't been wearing a tough denim jacket, I would have done some severe damage. As it was I managed to convey my unwillingness fairly thoroughly and we had to retreat from the edge of the wall.

But my victory was short-lived. While I was trying to figure out a way to get back to Hermanus and my log, Phlop got a blanket out of the car, I was wrapped up and, unable to resist, was carried down the ladder and into the boat.

Once below decks things improved. As long as I did not see all that water, my mind was at ease and I began to take stock of my surroundings. Like any good cat in a new place, I began to check out the area and, I must admit, it was very interesting. It was immediately clear that there would be no shortage of resting places here. There were six beds scattered through the interior and numerous nooks that could be used to curl up in should some privacy be required. But the most fascinating place was the bilges, the area under the floor of the cabins. It was dirty and dusty and the smell of diesel predominated, but there was also a musty odor that was not unattractive and, in one place, a small

puddle of salt water that had its own aroma. It not a place I would like to live in, but it was great fun to explore. I could climb into a cupboard, squeeze behind some tins and work my way all over the bottom of the boat, around the engine, under the cabins, behind the lockers, and come out in a totally different section. The first time I crawled in there I spent half an hour sniffing around and was pleased to hear Phlop and Rink calling me with a worried note in their ices. It was obvious they were concerned about me and I let them sweat a while before I came out. I was no longer angry about the way they had connived with Fatso to get me there, but I know that a bit of worry is good for people.

There were two other characters living on board when we arrived. Richard and Janet were younger than Daddy but older than Phlop and Rink. I did not give them much attention at first because I know better than to allow people to think they are of any consequence, as they surely would have done had I noticed them. I simply went about my business and allowed them to court me.

We spent a lot of time that day loading the junk from the car into the boat. At first I did not think there would be enough room to get it all away, but everything found a place and by evening there was nothing left except the six big boxes in which the stuff had traveled.

By evening there was another problem, the direct result of the kind of inconsiderate mental attitude typical of people who think what they are doing is more important than me. I had been on board for five hours and my bladder was about to burst. Search as I would, I could find no suitable place to relieve myself. I even had a look on deck, but the sight of all that water caused me to retreat below at once. It was not that I was afraid of the water. I have never been afraid of anything. It was just a nervousness that overtook me when I saw it. But that nervousness was nothing to the strain I felt as I looked all over the boat for a place to pee. Just as I was about to let go on a corner of the salon carpet, the only spot I could find that might be diggable, Rink came up with a plastic tray filled with sand and put me on it. It was better than nothing and far superior to the carpet, so I dug myself a hole and opened the flood gates. That was my first experience with a sandbox and I am pleased to say that I was adaptable enough to get used to it and never made a mess anywhere on the boat. Oh, there were times when I dug a little too enthusiastically and sand got all over the carpet in the fore castle, but as long as the box was there, I used it and nothing else.

I spent several days in Cape Town on the boat and a hectic time it was. More and more things kept coming to be stowed away. There was the day when Fatso brought hundreds and hundreds of cans which he and Richard loaded onto the table in the salon, on the berths, on the floor, until the whole place was a mass of cans. Then everybody spent hours putting each can into a plastic bag and packing them away in the lockers. There were bags and bags of rice, sugar, flour, all of which had to be poured into plastic bottles and stowed. When the fresh vegetables came the place began to look like a market. Carrots hung in a net in the bathroom, bags of potatoes stood in the bathtub, pounds of garlic were suspended in a bag from a hook in the salon, and cabbages rolled about in the bilges. Janet and Richard cut up a lot of those cabbages and put them in a bucket with some water, and then tied the bucket under a seat in the cockpit. That mixture was to become sauerkraut, but I doubted if the system would work. I can't imagine why they wanted sauerkraut in the first place, but I knew at a glance that that was not the way to get it. I could understand salami hanging by the cupboard door, but who needed

sauerkraut?

And it was not only the food and things that kept coming. There were plenty of people, too. It was through them that I was able to figure out what was going on. By lying quietly with my ears open I was able to piece together information that should have been made clear to me the start had the people been courteous enough to volunteer it. We were going to America, wherever that was, and would be at sea for at least three months. That's what Fatso kept saying to everybody who asked. "I can't see us doing it in under three months," was the constant refrain and it provoked various reactions. To many it seemed like a very long time and if you consider the thing from a cat's point of view in which three months is most two years it is a very long time. Others thought we would never make it within that period. It was the wrong time of year. Our route was not sensible. The boat would probably sink. We would get lost. The objections were innumerable, but I knew that all would be well as long as I was there. I would hold everything together by the strength of my will if I had to. Of course, nobody but me knew that. I kept my own counsel, and allowed everybody to make the usual human fuss even though I knew that when we arrived no credit would be given to me. They would all pat themselves on the back and think wonderful things about themselves, but the truth would be that had I had made the voyage possible.

Of all the people who came to visit us during those days only one was to come with us. That was Tony, a little fellow on a noisy motorcycle paid Daddy the thousand bucks he was asking and got a visa in time. Lots of others wanted to come but did not have the money or the time to get a visa, and so they were we were seven with Tony, and that struck me as enough. I would not have been able to control and that might have made a difference.

We kept on packing food and things on board until there was hardly an inch of space left. It was an exciting time for me and I confess I was looking forward to the voyage with a good deal of pleasurable anticipation. That may appear to be a contradiction to my earlier assertions that cats do not approve of dislocations, but if one examines the situation it is plain that this was to be something different. What most cats object to is the necessity of re-establishing themselves in a new environment. I have already explained how I overcame that problem through a philosophical recognition that I carry the most important part of my environment, me, with me. It should be clear, then, that this trip was to be an easy adjustment. Not only was my faith in myself unshaken, but my physical surroundings were coming along as well, I was taking my world with me. And that was not all: I had discovered that the white cat was not going to accompany us. She and Ouma and Lampie were going to fly to America and meet us there because Ouma was too old to sail with us. It seemed like a stupid decision on their part. Ouma was only eighty-eight at the time and quite capable of doing anything she wanted to do, but I suppose she did not want to come along. I know she did not want to fly, either, and I agreed with her on that point. It sounded like a very dangerous activity and nothing would make me engage in it but I did have some pleasant moments thinking of how miserable the white cat would be, especially when compared to the life I was going to have. Being the only cat on the boat made me even more special than ever. I would have six people vying for my attention and that was a great big plus. By the time the three months were up those six people would be thoroughly trained.

I do not know what system was in effect for stocking the boat for the trip, but I

suspect it was the usual human backassward effort. It is my belief that they did not decide what they needed and then acquire it. What they did was to see how much space they had and jam it full of whatever they could get their hands on. Things just kept coming until the boat was full and then new areas would be found and more things were brought to fill them. I soon decided that it would be impossible for me to check on everything and so restricted myself to those items that concerned me directly. I made sure they had plenty of food for me by carefully examining what they called Chris's stock. I could see at a glance that it would be insufficient, but decided it could be supplemented by the tuna and sardines they had bought for themselves. I was very worried about my box of sand for a while. Every day while we were tied up to the wall one of the children would empty it and bring fresh sand from the shore, but where was the sand going to come from when we were at sea? That question was answered when Fatso found a big plastic drum in the lazarette and lashed it to the rail on the after deck. Then he took two buckets and began to fill the drum with sand. It took him hours. He had to fill the buckets from a pile of sand way down at the end of the quay, carry them to the boat and down the ladder and then scoop the sand into the drum. I had a lovely time watching him sweating away, especially when little accidents would occur, like when the ladder shifted and he dropped the bucket into the bay and had to fish it out, dry it off and fill it again. Or when he tried to pour sand into the drum and spilled most of it on the deck, which he then had to sweep clean. It was good for my soul to watch him persevere and to reflect that all that effort was for me.

When the boat was finally full, we moved away from the wall to the club jetty to take on water and fuel. That was a terrifying experience for me, or at least a very nervous moment. In the first place there must have been about a thousand people cluttering up the decks. Lampie was there, several of Phlop's friends, several of Rink's. Tony's wife and some of their friends, some characters who had been helping Fatso drink beer while we were getting ready, Janet's parents and family, friends of Rick, and a lot of people who stood around the dock saying that they would never put to sea in that boat. The confusion engendered by all those people was staggering. Each had something to say about me, too, and the need to spread my attention was no small part of my concern.

In the second place, there was the engine. This is located right in the middle of the salon and makes a terrible racket when it is going. It stinks, too, which makes it especially offensive. When they started that thing up I had to run away and the only place to run to was the deck, and, of course, that was surrounded by water. I do not know what would have happened to me if the children hadn't needed my reassurance. They must have been very nervous, too, because they picked me up and it calmed me when I remembered my duty was to keep an eye on them. That is what is good about responsibility. In moments of stress one is reminded of the indispensable nature of one's being.

It took ages to get away from the jetty. The water tanks had to be filled, as well as the fuel tanks; a last shower had to be taken and a final beer to be consumed before all the friends and relatives were kicked off the boat and the lines let go. Some idiot on the shore began ringing a big bell, which gave me quite a fright, and people on the other boats blew their hooters and shouted inane greetings as we motored out of the yacht basin. That's what humans do when anything happens. Make lots of noise. Fatso was the worst of the lot. He was so busy shouting and waving and blowing his hooter that he nearly crashed

into several boats at their moorings.

Somehow or other we got out of the harbor and the only noise was that of the engine. I remember thinking that three months of that cacophony would drive me around the bend and was considering the advisability of swimming ashore when Fatso started to shout orders. First, everybody had to take the sail covers off, which entailed a lot of crawling around on deck and getting in each other's way. Then the mainsail had to be raised, which was a pretty straightforward operation and involved only pulling on a rope, but which took fifteen minutes because nobody knew which rope to pull on.

Then the Jib had to be bent on and raised. That was a farce and a half. Tony had no idea of what to do, so he held onto the rail and watched. Phlop was busy putting the sail covers away and Karin was holding onto me. Richard and Janet were the only ones left, so they got busy and bent the jib onto the wrong stay. Then they got it onto the right stay, but forgot to tie the tack down, so that when they raised it the whole thing just kept going up. Then they tied down the tack but put on the sheets so that they came inside the stays so the sail had to be dropped again, the sheets re-set, and, finally, the two of them were able to hoist the sail. There were no problems with the forestaysail or the mizzen because their halyards were the last two ropes left to be pulled. By the time all the sails were up, we were way out in the bay and moving around Robbin Island, a little lump of land the government uses for holding political prisoners. At long last, the motor was shut off and there was quiet on board. In fact, it was quite pleasant. There was a bit of movement and plenty of water around the boat, but neither of those things bothered me much, now that the machine was off. It was relaxing to listen to the water moving past the hull and I can tell you that after the strain of our departure I was ready to be relaxed. I went below, found a comfortable spot on one of the berths, and curled up for a nap. I could see from the way things had started that I would have to avail myself of every possible opportunity to rest if I was going to keep that show on the road. At least we were on our way to what would be our first port of call, the island of St. Helena.

There was little peace that first night. The wind dropped with the sun and we rolled about in a most distressing manner with the sails flapping. I spent most of my time with Karin who had suddenly become ill and would not get out of bed. She lay there with a bucket on the floor next to the berth and although she was a restless bed-mate, I did my best to keep her warm and to encourage her by showing her how comfortable I was. Even when she made those disgusting noises into the bucket, I purred at her and I never complained when she tossed and turned in her sleeping bag or groaned aloud. I am convinced that the best way to cure sickness is to present an example of health and contentment. Anybody lying helpless and miserable can only be improved by the spectacle of another in the full enjoyment of physical well-being.

Aside from helping Karin, I had to keep an eye on the crew, too. They were doing things right through the night. There was always somebody in the cockpit, playing with the wheel and looking around for other ships. First Rick sat there for three hours, then Tony, then Janet, and finally Fatso. At one point in the night Janet woke everybody up by shouting at Fatso that we were headed east and he went up on deck and told her that we were not headed anywhere. We were only pointing east. I had a look out the porthole, and he was right. We were drifting northwards with the current, but it did not much matter which way the sharp end of the boat was pointing.

By dawn a breeze came up and we started to move in the right direction, or at

least in the direction in which Fatso was guiding the boat. The sails were full, and the boat was much steadier and I could only hope that old Skin-head knew what he was doing. Like all cats, I have a magnificent sense of direction but I confess I am not much good at charts. Because of that minor handicap, I had to depend on him to point us in the right direction. If we were to change course for any reason, I would know about it, but I was unable to set the course. Lest any foolish person mistakenly consider that as a weakness on my part, allow me to point out that the true navigators were the ones who followed a cat-like procedure of getting from A to B. They went to sea with none of the fancy aids that are used today. No Lorans, SATNAV, sextants, charts, compasses were used for the first voyages of discovery. Those sailors went to where they were 'ping and came back in the same way a cat would have done. The development of navigational tools merely enabled inferior beings to attempt with great fuss and much self congratulation what had already been accomplished by their predecessors and which could be done by any cat. My inability to read a chart is merely a further indication of my innate superiority.

I had learned a great deal, that first night at sea. Many important points had been established, such as the fact that it was Philip who was to feed me and clean out my sand box. That was information worth having. I was also conscious that my presence was essential to the success of the voyage, something I had strongly suspected, but it was nice to have it confirmed. Who but me would be able to supervise the watches? Who but me was there to set an example for Karin to emulate? Who else was there to keep the crew's morale up? I was conscious of a sensation of great satisfaction as the sun rose that morning. I had been called and not found wanting. It was a good feeling.

The only thing that bothered me was the distress I experienced when going on deck. The sight of all that water was too alarming to be taken lightly and I was aware that I would have to overcome the nervousness that attacked me whenever I saw it. I resolved to conquer it that very morning. I set my teeth, hopped into the cockpit and climbed out onto the decks. Staying very close to the inboard side I walked slowly and steadily right around the boat. I even glanced over the side a couple of times, just to get used to the sensation. It was a gallant effort and typical of my heroic spirit, not diminished by the knowledge that Fatso followed me the entire way. I have never needed his attendance. I did not need it then, and I saw no necessity for the old fool to tag along, but I could not force him to remain in the cockpit and had to put up with his company. His intrusion on so personal an exercise was typical of a pushy personality. I forgave him, however, and even sat on him for a while when we returned to the cockpit, letting him scratch my ears and smooth the fur around my neck.

Mornings were to become my favorite time of the day. That was primarily because of my breakfast, to which I always looked forward. But there was also the duty I assumed for myself--that of waking everybody up. I found that if I did not rouse them, the whole crew would sleep half the day away. I suppose that was because they were all up for at least some of the night, but so was I. I did not have to stay in bed for most of the morning. Why should they? As soon as the sun was properly up I would make the rounds. I would climb onto a snoring body and sniff at a nose until the owner woke up and tried to toss me off. Then I would go to the next and repeat the procedure and before you knew it, everybody was awake.

Then I would go into the salon and sit in front of the shelf on which my bowls

were stowed. The water dish was kept full, but the food bowl was always empty after a few minutes after I was served. I would sit there and look at the empty bowl with all the patience I could muster. Everybody thought that was very funny and their amusement often extended the period I was forced to wait. There would be shouts of "Look at Chris!" and the whole lot of them would gather around and chuckle and my breakfast would have to wait until they were finished. It often made me cross and I would glare at them, but they were so insensitive that it did no good. In fact, my anger seemed to increase their mirth. Often Fatso would exacerbate the situation by a monologue that pretended to put into words the feelings I was demonstrating. "Hey. Gimme food. Hurry up. Don' jussan der. I'm hongry. Goddam stupid!" He was pretty close to the truth in his rendering, but, of course, I would never have used such language. Unfortunately, the routine usually cracked Philip up and so more time was wasted. Sometimes he didn't bring my breakfast until after eight o'clock.

Perhaps the best thing about a sea voyage is the routine by which one must live. This does exist on shore, of course, but there are always distractions that interfere with the orderly progress of events. The neighbors drop in for coffee. The weather causes plans to be changed. A telephone call interrupts a dinner. The postman is late, so the day is ruined. Even the days of the week, a routine in themselves, interrupt the system of life. Because Monday is a holiday, certain business must be transacted on Friday and Tuesday's normal activities are disrupted. Even weekends constitute an unnecessary change. People stay in bed too long and do not go to bed at a sensible time. Bodies clutter up the house that was empty during the other five days of the week. A great many things are done merely for the sake of change.

But at sea the routine is always the same. One is concerned with the business of living and the days are divided into periods that recur with regularity. There are, the watches to be stood at night, the sun sights taken every noon, the meals to be prepared at roughly the same hours of every day. And all the time, there is the constant concern for the ship. The movement forward is continually in progress and is the *raison d'être* that governs everything. There will be moments when occurrences seem to disrupt that movement, but these are superficial and do not really change anything. The voyage goes on and with it the routine it imposes.

Also, what makes cruising a valuable exercise for humans is the fact that whatever is done or not done has immediate and obvious consequences. All actions pertaining to the ship must be undertaken or something will happen. There are reasons for everything and that is not the case ashore where much of the activity is a gratuitous bumbling that could be done or not and nobody would notice the difference. What it boils down to is that things are simplified at sea. Only those things which pertain to the voyage are important. It is good for humans to be forced to limit their concerns. It teaches them to deal with what is necessary and to accept what they cannot change, which is almost out of the question ashore. There, none of them seems to know what he or she is doing. In short, cruising teaches people to behave like cats: to eat, sleep, and do what they have to do. They can only benefit from the experience.

About a week out of Cape Town we had a little gale. By that time I had come to terms with the water around the boat and would often take walks on the deck when I felt like a bit of exercise, and so I was able to witness the blow .without any nervousness. It was rather exciting to sit in the cockpit on Philip's lap and watch the big seas come up

astern. The boat would rise to the steeply running water, pause for an instant, and then surf down the wave, which was quite a feat for a big heavy steal ketch. At one point I was considering a stroll and had actually climbed out of the cockpit when a mass of water came right onto the deck and wet my paws. I can assure you I did not appreciate that. I leapt right back into the cockpit and wiped my feet on Philip. It served him right. He laughed his head off when I got wet.

Aside from that the gale presented no problem. The crew took down the jib and mizzen and we sailed on under the full main and the little forestaysail. We were going along very nicely and in the right direction, which made everybody happy, me included. I enjoyed immensely the sensation of speed as we tore down the seas, and also the sense of security that was achieved after the first few hours of the gale had shown us that the boat was sound. Fatso was the only one of us who did not need such reassurance, since in past years he had already skippered two trans-Atlantic crossings aboard TINA (our boat's name), but for me, and for the others, it was comforting to have had her soundness tested and found reliable.

Because of the gale, I even began to take pride in my adaptability, something that had never been necessary before. I admit that I was and am used to making the world conform to my requirements, but it is a measure of true greatness to accept the inevitable without regret. Therefore, I was justifiably proud of myself when I learned how to walk and sit in a manner not typically feline. Anybody who has watched a cat cannot help being impressed by our daintiness. When moving, we place one foot in front of another, as though we were walking a tightrope. When sitting, our front paws are side by side, almost touching, a posture that is both elegant and refined. But on the boat and during the gale, I learned to walk with my paws as far apart as was possible to compensate for the motion and I would sit with five inches between my feet, a position that would have been ridiculous ashore but which was in keeping with conditions at sea. Needless to say, the entire crew found this development extremely amusing and would howl with laughter when I made my way about the boat or sat in front of my bowl, waiting for my dinner.

That is the way with ignorant beings. They were being thrown all over the boat with every surge. They could not move from the stove to the table in the salon without hanging on with both hands and half the time they still ended up bashing into a bulk head or sitting unexpectedly on a berth, often with somebody asleep in it. They would spend twenty minutes staggering about the place trying to make a cup of coffee and then, after spilling half of it over the carpet, would put it on a shelf and then swear prodigiously when a sea came along and turned the cup over. And they were laughing at me, the only one on the boat who could be counted on not to fall against something.

But I had my moments of revenge. Once, when I was sitting on the edge of a bunk trying to wake up Tony, they all came running below in response to Philip's call to come and have a look at me. We were heeling at the time and there was a slight roll to the boat, so of course, was seated on the only part of the berth that was upright most of the time-- the edge. As the ship moved I would compensate and lean against the movement in order to maintain the vertical. That was the only sensible thing to do. I was perfectly comfortable, had almost succeeded in waking Tony, a job that required patience and perseverance, and there they were, bumping into each other, ramming their heads against any protuberances that were handy, tripping over their feet, and generally maiming themselves, and laughing at me while making remarks to the effect that I was better than

a gyroscope and who needed an expensive gauge to tell the angle of heel when they had me aboard. The hilarity lasted until Karin fell against Rick who bumped into Jan and the three of them sent Fatso sprawling on top of Tony who finally woke up and began his usual wail for coffee. That is the kind of demonstration I like. It shows in a manner not otherwise possible how my system is superior to theirs.

Our gale lasted for about three days and was followed by five days of calm weather during which we made very little headway. I found it a dull, uninteresting time after the first day or so, but the crew was idiotically happy. Fatso hung a tire off the railing at the stern and then dove off the bow. We were going so slowly that he was able to surface and grab the tire without swimming a stroke and soon everybody was in and out of the water at various times of the day. They even tied a life ring onto a long rope and trailed it astern. That was supposed to be a safety factor, a hedge against the odd puff of wind that might have come up and sent the boat away from anybody in the water, but those idiots thought it was fun to hand themselves down the rope and sit in the ring, thirty yards away from the boat and at the mercy of any creature in the water that happened to be hungry. I was glad that Fatso did not try that trick. He was the only one who could navigate at the time, I did experience some anxiety when Phlop decided to try it. I thought it was the height of irresponsibility. He was the one who saw to my dinner and my sandbox and his loss would have been a serious one to the smooth running of the ship. I was glad when the breeze came up and we were moving too quickly to allow for water sports. Aside from the dangers inherent in the activity, it is a stupid thing to do. Imagine the mentality of one who not only goes into water willingly, but who actually enjoys it. It passeth understanding.

The gale and the days of calm ended and with them Karin's seasickness. Soon everyone was sitting a watch for two hours during the day and five of them stayed up for two hours at night. That left a day off for one every sixth day, an arrangement that somewhat complicated my routine. I had developed the habit of moving from berth to berth during the night. When the watch changed, there was always a warm bunk available and I would climb into it. Two hours later there would be another and I would move into that, thereby assuring myself a constant supply of cozy resting places. But with one berth occupied for the entire night, the rotation became erratic. Instead of going from Tony's berth to Philip's, I would have to go to Karin's. It meant that I had to look around the boat and find the newly vacant bunk instead of maintaining an orderly cycle.

During the daylight hours there was always something going on, usually very annoying to me. The most prominent of these activities was Project Carpet Cleaning. The whole boat was covered by carpets that had been lying there for three or four years in Cape Town, being stepped on by feet filthy from the dock area and collecting muck from the various repairs that had been made to the boat. I found a fascinating collection of odors there, but Fatso determined to have the rugs clean by the time we got to America. Janet and Richard took them all on deck and gave them a brushing, but that only scratched the surface. Therefore the skipper decided that he would vacuum the carpets every time he charged the batteries, reasoning that he would not drain the power if he used the twelve volt vacuum while the engine was pushing amps into the batteries. I was intrigued by the vacuum cleaner at first. It was an interesting looking little red machine and I examined it while he was getting it ready to work. When he turned it on, I happened to sniff it, and it damn near took my whiskers off. I can assure you I did not like that one

little bit. From then on I removed myself to the forecandle whenever the cleaner came off its shelf, and I remained there until it was put away. I do not like anything fooling around with my whiskers.

Sometimes things would break and have to be fixed. The bilge pump became blocked and the skipper had to strip it, breaking the belts that held it together in the process. It was only to be expected. They used the system of "If it don't work, force it," and so much of their labor entailed improvising repairs made necessary by their own ham-handedness. They got the bilge pump fixed, but it took them five hours to do so and another forty minutes to clean up the mess they had made looking for new bolts and the tools they needed to do the job. Afterwards they were all very pleased with themselves and spent hours sitting around bragging about how smart they were.

The bilge pump was nothing compared to the fuss they made about the steering cables that came loose from the quadrant. In the first place, they spent half the morning blithely steering the boat without being aware that they had a problem. Richard was at the wheel and had an inkling that something was wrong when it took seven complete turns to effect a couple of degrees' correction, but an hour passed before he realized that he did not really have control of the boat. Then he called the others and they pulled the pedestal apart and crawled around in the bilges, replacing the wires in the clamps. It took four of them an hour to do the job and the noise they made was terrific--shouting instructions to each other, calling for tools, swearing like mad because they had to move in cramped spaces, and eventually emerging, covered with the grease from the cables and grime from the bilges, with such self-satisfaction that one would have thought they had saved the universe from extinction.

When they were not breaking or fixing things, they spent their time lying about or eating. I would be the first to admit to a partiality to meals, but these boys were always busy with something to stuff into their faces. Breakfast would hardly be over before Rick could be seen slouching around in the galley, trying to figure out how to combine seventeen cloves of garlic with two spoonfuls of chili powder, an onion, and a packet of soup to make gravy for the half potato that had been left over from dinner the previous night. When Rick was finished, Philip would be making pop corn, followed by Fates spreading cheese on crackers, and Tony heating up a can of beans. Then the cook for the day would start on dinner.

I have to admit that I was eating very well, those early days. Fatso had bought me an entire case of tinned fish which Philip would dole out to me morning and night. It was my practice to prepare myself for meals well in advance and I would sometimes be found sitting in front of my empty bowl as early as five in the morning, waiting to be served. That seemed to amuse them all. They had no sympathy for my predicament. There I was, practically starving, sitting there, staring at the bowl and waiting for my scoff, and they would laugh and make remarks about me being fat enough already, as though a cat could be too fat, and threatening not to feed me at all that day. But I knew they were bluffing and would wait patiently until they had had their fun. The only trouble was that by the time the food was served I was ravenous and would gobble it all up in a second which usually made me ill.

I became ill the time they caught the squid, too. Little ones would squirt themselves onto the deck from time to time and be found as dried out bits of tough leather that were not fit for feline consumption and were usually requisitioned for part of

that exercise in futility the crew called fishing. There were always lines trailing astern with lures on them, if you can use the term "lures" for the abortions Fatso put together with the top of a bean tin and a strip of sail cloth. I was not surprised they were unsuccessful. But one night Rick put out the squid jig and hooked a monster that filled a two-gallon bucket. He also caught a snake mackerel that was about a yard long and an inch in diameter and had a vicious looking mouth full of nasty teeth sticking out all over the place. They showed him to me, but I was not impressed. The big squid was another matter, however. He stayed in the bucket until morning and then the crew got to work cleaning him while Richard took over the galley and made calamari for three hours. They fried him in garlic oil, chili oil, and curry and they seasoned him with any other spice they could find on the boat. All you could hear were the sounds of chewing and groans of delight as they stuffed themselves and regret to report that that was one time we were unanimous in our approval. He was delicious and I, too, overindulged and fell ill.

When nothing was breaking and there was a lull in the stuffing of faces, there were the navigation classes. We had two sextants on board and Fatso decided to teach other yo-yos how to navigate. He explained that it would be a good idea if there was someone besides himself on board who could find his way around the ocean--dust in case something happened to Fatso. Another example of human conceit. "Someone else" indeed! I was there, was I not? I already knew where the island of St. Helena was, in spite of the twists and turns imposed by the gale and the down wind tacks we had been performing. I could point that boat at our destination any time I wanted to and there they were worrying about who was going to get us there.

They spent a lot of time looking through the sextants and working out sights, which gave them something to do and allowed them to feel important. There were moments of amusement when our latitude turned out to be some thousand miles north of the equator while we were still in the southern hemisphere and one sight carefully worked out by Janet was plotted as almost in the geometric center of the Kalahari Desert. Everybody thought that was very funny and there were shouts to the helmsman to keep an eye open for ostriches and not to run down any cacti. Naturally, I sat unobtrusively in the corner and let them have their fun. I knew Janet was plotting degrees when she should have been plotting minutes west of Greenwich, and I think Fatso knew it, too. Unusual, however, for him – he sat there and let her make the mistake without once trying to pull out a few of the remaining hairs on his head.

Thanks to my patience and understanding, Janet got to be a whizz with the sextant, and Richard was a close second, although both continued to encounter problems working out the sight. But that was because Fatso was always there, breathing down their necks and ready to correct any mistake in the process as it was made. No one ever really learns how to do something unless they have to do it, and humans usually have to repeat a procedure several times before they become competent. I am sure that they would have learned faster if they had been left alone.

As it turned out, all the navigation classes in the world would have proven useless for our approach to St. Helena. They took their sights right up to about a hundred and sixty miles from the island and the following day found us floating around under a sky so overcast that there wasn't a hint of the sun. The skipper reassured the crew that all was well, that the sun was sure to come out on the following day and we would get a fix, but at the time he told everyone to keep an extra sharp watch that night so that we did not

collide with the island. He made it clear that there were no lights on the side of the island we were approaching, so I do not know what the extra sharp watch was to be looking for, but I was not worried. I would know when we were close.

The next morning came and there was still no sun. We were sailing into a thick mist that was just short of a fog, the kind of deceitful condition that makes it impossible to judge distances accurately because there is no horizon. The grey sky just merges with the grey ocean a mile or ten away. I could tell that Fatso was getting worried by the way he kept mumbling about taking down the sails and sitting around there until the sun came out to give us a position. I remember thinking to myself, "Yes, Hotshot, you're so clever with your sextant and your charts and your variation-deviation nonsense, so now what do you do when a little mist messes up the whole system?" I went up on the bow, had a sniff or two, and recognized the smell of land right in front of us. I knew that even my bunch of incompetents couldn't miss the island as soon as their inferior sense of sight came into play, so I went below for a nap.

An hour or so later my conviction was confirmed when Philip was heard up forward shouting about an island right on the bow. Everybody came running on deck to look at the phenomenon and stood on the foredeck saying, "Yes, yes. There it is!" while looking in three different directions and pointing at various banks of clouds. Then they began to doubt Philip and asserted that he was seeing clouds, not land, and asking him if he saw the Harbor Master walking his dog on the beach or if the young lady had really taken off the top of her bikini before she went for a swim. When even Fatso, the blindest of the bunch, decided that Philip was right and it was St. Helena, everybody claimed to have seen it first. Tony had "thought" the lump on the horizon was land, Richard had "told" us it was there, Janet had been "sure" that was it, and Karin had "seen" it but had decided not to tell anybody about her discovery. Then Fatso got all dictatorial and issued a skipper's edict to the effect that Philip was the first to have sighted the island. He even wrote it in the log to make it official, thereby immortalizing yet another bit of human presumption. It was, after all, I who had spotted land first.

We sailed and then motored up to the island, arrived at James Bay just as darkness fell. They had a special spotlight there with some three-hundred-thousand candle power. This they hooked up to batteries and its beam probed the darkness, causing bags of panic when the light began to pick up flashes of the boats that were moored in the bay. But we were guided by shouts of "Come in closer!" from a dark spot in the bay in a voice we could recognize as that of Christine whom we had met in Cape Town on the yacht EUCALYPT. They had left youth Africa a couple of hours after we had, and arrived at St. Helena a day before. They had taken an even three weeks, while we had taken twenty-two days, which, all agreed, was not too awe-inspiring for a two-week trip. The crew of EUCALYPT, Christine, Kerry, and Gary, came over to TINA as soon as our hook was down, bringing with them Robert and Jaro, from the SAROYA, and they all sat around boozing and babbling about what had happened to them on their respective voyages. What seemed to surprise them the most was the fact that three boats making their ways from the same port to the same destination at the same time should experience the same conditions. Wonder of wonders, EUCALYPT had had a gale followed by calm as we had. Amazing that there had been no sun on the same day in the same place: But there was no mention of the most astonishing fact: all had actually gotten to where they were going and two boats out of the three had done it without my help!

I had a glance at the island in the morning when I went on deck for a stroll. It looked rather bleak and uninteresting from where I was standing. I saw one scroungy black cat sneaking around the shore and reflected that he had better keep out of my way if I decided to come visiting. He was obviously no match for me. But I was not sure I would bother to go ashore. What worried me was how I was going to get there. We were at anchor a couple of hundred yards from the shore and I could not figure out how they expected to cross the water. Then they put the little red dinghy that had been lashed on deck over the side and climbed into it and I decided that nothing short of anesthesia would get me into that tiny wobbler. I went below and hid until they were all on their way and then came up to watch them. They rowed into a place where there were some concrete steps going down into the water. Above the steps was an iron pipe with a rope hanging from it. The system was to grab the rope and swing ashore and I expected to see the lot of them in the drink. But I was disappointed and they all made it safely. I curled up in Karin's berth for a nap.

Less than an hour later I awoke to feel the boat moving. It was barely perceptible, but there was a definite drift, and I hopped into the cockpit to see what was going on. A quick glance around explained the situation. The anchor was dragging. The boat was moving slowly out to sea and as soon as the hook broke loose from the bottom, would be headed for points north with nobody on board but me. It was a disquieting predicament. Who would empty my sandbox? Who would feed me? Was I doomed to starve slowly as I traveled to the other side of the world? It was typical of those yo-yos that they should bungle a simple operation like anchoring and leave me to cope. Just as I was getting really angry, Robert rowed over from SAROYA, climbed on deck and let out some more chain, which stopped the movement. Then his son, Jaro, pulled ashore and soon Fatso, Rick, and Tony appeared and got to work. This time they did a proper job, moving the boat in closer to shore, letting out plenty of chain, and even putting out a second anchor, all of which reinforces my conclusions about humans. They have to do everything twice before they can get it right. But at least I was able to nap with confidence from then on.

We stayed in James Bay for five days while the crew explored the island and I enjoyed the peace and quiet of an empty boat. Except for Fatso, they all climbed the six-hundred-and-ninety-nine step Jacob's Ladder that ran up a cliff on the west side of the town. Fatso said it was an ambition of his not to climb the ladder ever, an ambition he was glad to fulfill. They telephoned South Africa, sent off postcards, ate every available hamburger the locals could supply, and complained bitterly because the pub was out of beer and they had to wait until a ship came and delivered some more. Fatso rowed back and forth with plastic bottles to fill the water tanks and even had the sense unusual for him to replenish the supply of sand in the drum lashed to the rail. Then, without any consultation with me, they pulled up the anchors and set off for Fernando de Noronha, wherever that was.

CHAPTER IV

We left St. Helena in the early evening, so we fell into the watch system at once, taking up where we had left off. I for one was glad to be going again and I think the rest of the crew agreed with me, although they all said they had liked the island and its people very much. I suppose it is nice to stop every once in a while, but the real life on a small boat is found when you are sailing. That is when the routine takes charge and things go as they should. During the stops the dishes don't get washed, the meals are erratic, and one never knows when one will be disturbed by some idiot who has stayed ashore too late and comes flopping into the bunk one is occupying at an ungodly hour of the morning. There are even occasions when prolonged activities ashore cause a delay in serving the dinner of the ship's cat, and sand boxes are not emptied at the proper times. But once at sea things are as they should be. Gone are the problems of dragging anchors and possible collisions with boats at moorings. Gone, too, is the surging pull of the boat at anchor, a motion that is far less comfortable than the thrust of a hull moving through the water as much as they enjoyed the stop, and as much as I enjoyed the quiet of an empty boat, it was good to get going again.

We had not been off the island for a day before Richard and Tony started in on their kites. They had tried to make one on the way from Cape Town, but the wood had been too heavy and the thing had gone straight into the drink. Tony had found some bamboo on St. Helena, however, and this, because of some local prohibition against removing bamboo, was carefully stowed until the island was a hundred miles astern. Then it was brought forth with such expressions of triumph that one would have thought a great discovery had been made. Those two dolts were in their element. If such energy and enthusiasm could have been channeled into some project of value, they could have been rich, but both would have rebelled at the thought of accomplishing anything constructive. Making a kite, however, was classified as fun, and they spent hour splitting the bamboo, lashing the pieces together, taping on piece of plastic bag, and then discussing modifications to the design. Invariably they would emerge from the salon, which looked as though it had been a factory operated by a school for the mentally retarded, babbling about how this model could not fail; this one was so aerodynamically perfect that it would probably be of use in propelling the boat; this one was the kite to end all kites.

Then they would spend ten minutes trying to get the thing into the air, fail, and sit around looking at a wet piece of plastic, wondering why their efforts had been so futile. Once and only once did they get a kite into the air and that was about number eight. In keeping with their performance as losers, they got it well up then the string broke, and the lot went into the drink. For some reason they thought that was a triumph.

They amused themselves in other ways, too, usually as childishly as the kite- (Ha!)flying. Take the bottles, for instance. In Cape Town Fatso had bought five cases of whiskey which he said he going to sell in Brazil, but it seemed to me that they would have to have a good market for empty bottles if he was going to make any money out of that venture. Those guys would open a bottle at the slightest provocation, like a pressing need to celebrate five o'clock, or as a reward for doing absolutely nothing for an entire day. The empties would not be thrown over the side with the other trash. They would be saved as containers for letters. For a week or two they would be wedged behind the

cushions in the cockpit until a good supply was at hand. Then Philip or Fatso would produce some paper and a pen and write a series of notes telling whoever found the bottle that it was sent off from the yacht TINA en route to Fernando and that the finder should answer the letter to claim a reward from Neptune. Talk about Junk Mail! The only sensible thing about the operation was that the cockpit got cleaned up and even that was temporary because Fatso always rewarded himself for his literary effort by bringing up another bottle to empty.

Twice Richard used empty bottles to make model boats. The first was a monohull that took two and a half hours to construct, complete with ballast keel and sloop rig. That one tipped over on its side immediately. The second was a catamaran, which, although well down in the bow, managed to remain upright and sailed well, backwards.

But a more important aspect to me of this leg of the trip was the discovery of the most delicious comestible in the universe. If we are going to talk about ambrosia, be quiet and listen to me, for I have partaken of flying fish and none of the delicacies you might mention can compare. I was introduced to this delight one night by Philip when I was sitting with him in the cockpit during his watch. There was a flopping sound on the deck and I was rudely pushed from his lap while he went forward and brought back an object I did not at first recognize. He held it out for my inspection and it startled me by leaping out of his hand to land with much flopping on the floor of the cockpit.

Naturally, I was intrigued by this strange being, but of course I did not make any effort to approach it until I was sure it was harmless. Curiosity never killed a cat, but incautious actions could be dangerous to one's health. I watched the thing leap around for a while, from a safe distance, and endured a stream of what he thought were witticisms from Philip who found my natural wariness extremely amusing. Watch out, Chris! He'll bite your leg off." Or, "Be careful he doesn't crash against you and crush you." Remarks like that only demonstrate the speaker's lack of perception. He knew the fish was defenseless, but I did not. As a matter of fact, although I had consumed tons of fish in my lifetime, I had never before encountered a live one. So I waited until he had stopped flopping around. Then I had a sniff of him and only after thoroughly examining him, took a tentative bite. That first delicious morsel will remain in my memory through all of my nine lives and I can assure you that the rest of that fish disappeared immediately--head, wings, guts, and scales, so that there remained nary a trace of him. Then I was ready for the next one, which came on hoard a few minutes later and which Philip brought to me in the cockpit. No cautious examination this time. That fellow was still trying to flop himself back into the water when the last of him went down my throat and I was ready for the next. And the next. And the next. It never rains flying fish, but it pours them, and by the time Philip's watch was over I had enjoyed seventeen of them, ranging from three to eight inches long and all equally delicious. Then I went below to wait for my breakfast which caused much hilarity among the crew who seemed to think that I had had enough nourishment. What nonsense. I could go through fifty flying fish and still eat my breakfast.

From that morning on I made it my business to patrol the decks every day, searching for fish that had come aboard without our having noticed them. Sometimes they would get caught under the dinghy or behind one of the sails in bags lashed to the rails, but I am sure I found them all. When the situation calls for thoroughness, as when one's stomach is involved, I follow through.

Since I had overcome my nervousness at the sight of all that water around the boat, I would often stroll the decks for the benefit of my constitution. I was certainly in fine shape physically having picked up a couple of pounds, and my emotional state was, as usual, perfection. The same was true, to a lesser degree, of the crew. Under my guidance and example they had become fair sailors and better beings than they had been. There were a few retrogressions now and then when one or another was rude to me, such as the time Tony stepped on my tail and had to be disciplined to encourage him to look where he was going, even in the dark. But his foot healed quickly and the lesson seemed to have had an effect because he never did it again.

Tony was a strange young man, incidentally. One afternoon he amazed me by performing the weirdest series of maneuvers I had ever seen. He lay face down on the coachroof and pushed himself up with his arms about forty times. Then he lay on his back and sat up forty times. Then he lay on his side and lifted his right leg up straight forty times, and repeated the performance with his left leg. By that time he was sweaty and out of breath, so he took a bath on the foredeck, a practice I deplored because it made the side-decks wet and slippery and sometimes even caused my feet to become wet.

Each one of the crew was guilty of that offense, however. Never a day went by without one or all of them grabbing a towel and some dishwashing soap and going up forward to the bucket that was kept lashed to the rail. They would douse themselves, soap up, and then rinse off with gallons of water, all of which ran down the side decks the entire length of the boat and off the stern. You can imagine the distress caused to the quiet stroller, enjoying a sunny perambulation, concentrating on his search for flying fish, and finding himself suddenly in the middle of a soapy river. Very disconcerting. Why they couldn't all do it at the same time is beyond me, but they didn't. They always took turns, thereby making it impossible to schedule a stroll when one could be sure of missing a deluge.

Tony performed his exercises intermittently, and I gathered that the purpose was to tone up his muscles, but there was no regularity and no routine and so it was no surprise to me to note that the effort did not make him any stronger. Whenever there was work to be done, such as winching up an anchor, Tony could be found leaning against the rail, supervising Rick's pumping on the handle. But then, Tony avoided most of the tasks that could be neglected. When he cut his finger on the string during one of his abortive kite-flying attempts, he was unable to take his turn washing dishes because the sea water stung so terribly, so he made a deal with Karin whereby she did his dishes and he sat some of her watch. The offending water did not prevent him from taking a bath that afternoon, however. What Tony was really good at was sitting in the salon, drinking coffee and talking about motorcycles and sex and trying to make Fatso stop at places he had already decided to avoid, like Ascension.

In fairness, I should say that Tony was not alone in that desire. None of the crew would have objected to a stop at an island full of cheap hamburgers, steaks, cold beer, and fresh-water showers. And, to place the blame squarely where it belongs, it was Fatso's enumeration of these delights that prompted the urge to swing by for a day or so. What made the temptation even greater was the fact that our down-wind tacking would bring us to within a couple of hundred miles of the island, a mere days and a half of sailing with the winds we had been encountering. But Fatso was adamant. A day and a half in and a day and a half out added up to three days. Add three days there and you

have six, which is almost a week, a startling bit of calculation which he delivered as though he were explaining the theory of relativity. Did we really want to spend a week for a hamburger? Tony certainly did. Rick and Janet wouldn't have minded, and Rink and Phlop were willing. As usual, I was not consulted, but I would have objected if I had been. Who needs to go out of one's way for some dead cow when there were flying fish around?

In the end, Fatso acted with a firm decisiveness that was typical of him. He compromised. If we came to within one hundred miles of Ascension without passing the island, we would stop.

Then the wind shifted slightly and we were able to hold a course straight for Fernando. we passed a point one hundred and sixty miles south of Ascension and, while Tony sulked, Fatso explained that while he, too, would have enjoyed a hamburger, it was just as well that we did not have to go further north. It seems that there is a belt across the ocean called the doldrums, an area of no wind through which we would have had to motor had we gotten caught in it. We were skirting the southern edge of that belt which was why he had planned the route to Fernando. With a bit of luck we would have wind right across the Atlantic and would save about a week in getting to the other side. I remember thinking "Big Deal!" All that fuss and planning for a week! What was the hurry? Did somebody have an appointment on the other side? Was not everyone enjoying the cruise?

It was just like a bunch of humans to get themselves into a situation that was as close to heaven as they were likely to find on earth and then make every effort to bring the activity to a close. There they were with the ship sailing herself most of the time; spending the warm, balmy days sunning themselves and the delightful nights under stars so close one could touch them; eating meals royalty would find an improvement over their customary diets, assuming royalty was fond of garlic. There they were with so little to do in the way of duties that they had twenty hours a day to pursue whatever activities appealed to them--reading, playing chess, sleeping--that it became a real work day when someone decided to do the laundry, a process that involved spraying some soap on the clothes, tying them to a line, and throwing them over the side where they would drag for a week or so. There was the crew, enjoying sunsets that displayed the glory of creation beyond anything they had hitherto imagined; having long, entertaining visits by enthusiastically playful dolphins and sedate whales on a gentle ocean whose clean, clear waters were more than benevolent, indeed positively protective; and this crew was in a hurry to bring the voyage to a conclusion. The extent of innate stupidity boggles the mind.

I am sure it has something to do with the human concept of time which they seem to regard as some kind of commodity that can be used up, like the whiskey in Fatso's bottles, which certainly was being depleted. They did not seem to realize that time simply cannot be wasted, that doing nothing is as much an activity as chasing a fortune or building a church; that growth is an inner process with its own schedule that cannot be hurried. How they missed this truth with my example before them will always be a mystery to me, but miss it they did.

Fatso even expounded on the need to get to America in time for Karin and Philip to attend the opening of the school they would be going to. Now you tell me? You take two fifteen-year-old kids who are learning self-discipline and self-reliance to the extent

that each has complete and sole charge of a forty-five foot yacht containing five other people and an important cat, on the darkest of nights in the middle of the ocean and who execute their duties cheerfully and competently; who will cook in a gale that throws the boat around so much it will scramble your eggs for you; who are reading, daily, anything from classics to crap; and who are learning to get along with a mixed crew in a harmony that is unheard-of ashore. You take all that into account and then explain why Fatso was in such a hurry to get them into a public school. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe one can waste one's time. With values like that it certainly seems so.

Although we did not stop at Ascension, it did not take long for us to arrive at Fernando. It was about three in the morning when Tony woke Fatso to tell him that there was a light ahead that appeared to be very close. Old Skin-Head performed his usual routine when called from his berth. He leapt out of bed and raced up to the cockpit to stare blindly into the night, seeing little besides a few blurs. Then he dashed below and fumbled around for his glasses, which he always put in the same place but never could find right away. Then it was back up on deck to have another look. "Yes," says the genius, "there is a light ahead", thereby confirming what everyone else has known all along. And yes, it does seem rather close. This judgment perplexes our hot-shot navigator. Fernando should be thirty-five miles away according to fix plotted the previous day and the light seems to be about seven or eight miles off. There was no way we could have gone a hundred and ten miles in fifteen hours at five knots. Perhaps there was an error in yesterday's position. Go check the calculations an exercise that is completed with frequent mad dashes to the deck to make sure we are not about to run aground and yields exactly the same position he had plotted. By that time everybody was on deck, chattering about how close the light -was, I decided to go up and have a look. I didn't even bother to get out of the cockpit. I just stuck my head over the coaming, had a whiff, and went below, satisfied that we were no longer in danger. The island was easily thirty-five miles off. Fatso's navigation had been right on the nose, but the amusing thing was that he wouldn't believe it. On the rare occasion that he did something right, there he was doubting himself. Typical!

As the sun rose, the panic died because even Fatso could see that we were well off the island. He made the fatuous observation that "It sure was a bright light" that had made him doubt his navigator and he would be more confident next time. I doubted that. If someone is used to screwing up, he generally expects to continue to do so. Personally, I would rather run blindly onto the rocks than admit the possibility of having made an error.

We made our way to the anchorage via a narrow channel that separates the big island from its smaller neighbor. Even I found it exciting to sail with the genoa boomed out to starboard and the main to port, as we had been for the last week, right straight into a little cut not more than seventy yards across and past rocks we could practically spit on, they were so close. I remember hoping that Fatso had read the chart right and that there were no shoals that he had overlooked. I could visualize him suddenly spotting breakers ahead and trying to turn the boat around against a twenty-knot wind with the sails goosewinged and no room to turn. Luckily we were close enough to swim ashore. I decided to stay on deck.

The anchorage at Fernando de Naronha is protected from the sea by a low spit of sand that does nothing to stop the strong, steady east wind that blows all year long. It

took us two tries to get the hook set to the skipper's satisfaction--it always takes him two tries to get something right--and that was half a mile from the beach with all the chain out. When I saw them getting the dinghy ready to go ashore, I went below and hid, in case they planned to take with them, but there was no need. They had enough trouble getting themselves ashore and didn't worry about me. First Rick, Jan, and Tony went. We could see Rick dropped the other two off just outside the line of surf. They swam to the beach while he came back for Phlop and Karin. Then Phlop came back for Fatso. When I heard old Skin-head telling Philip that he would do the rowing because the surf looked pretty tricky, I immediately came up on deck. I had two motives: I wanted to see the old slob actually do some work, and I wouldn't, for anything in the world, miss the spectacle of them both, with all the passports and ship's papers, being dumped by a breaking wave.

I hate to admit it, but the skipper did the working part pretty well. I suppose he was showing off for the natives and probably busted a gut trying to look good. But when he got in by the surf my vigilance was rewarded. There he was, carefully timing the waves coming up behind him, watching for a break in the rhythm, and then, when the sea was flat, really bending his back to the oars. He got to about fifteen yards from a safe, dry landing when a little ripple on the surface turned into a wave that lifted the stern of the dink, buried the bow, and turned the lot into the water. It was a riot and I was not alone in appreciating it. The crew ashore were laughing their heads off and so were several of the islanders. Even Philip, wet as he was, found his father's ham-handedness amusing. Only Fatso, who emerged from the water with one hand clutching the bag full of papers and the other holding his glasses onto his head, failed to see the humor of the event. The end result of the exercise was that the dinghy and the oars were washed ashore, but the oarlocks were lost to Neptune. One of the islanders donated another pair, so I did not have the satisfaction of watching them try to use the oars as paddles on future excursions.

Of course I did not see anything of the island beyond what was visible from the boat, but I heard enough to the crew's conversation to know that I wasn't missing much. Fernando belonged to Brazil and had been a prison island at one time but was a military post when we were there. It was an arid piece of rock with some sparse vegetation and a few houses around the barracks. There was a pub on the beach where Fatso sold some dollars at twice the bank rate and where Tony got rid of a couple of bottles of the whiskey he had brought from Cape Town, making a profit of about six hundred percent. Even Rick and Jan, who were as close to broke as one can get without actually hitting rock bottom, managed to sell a small cigarette rolling machine. They made enough to allow them to grab a meal at a local restaurant which consisted of a table under a tree in someone's back yard where one ate a delicious chicken whose brothers and sisters scavenged the ground around the table. There was a store that was open: A, when there was anything to sell; B, when the proprietor felt ambitious, and C, when there was anybody around to buy anything. Our lot used the last of their black-market cruzeiros to pick up a few items they thought they needed, including several bottles of the local rot-gut, a spirit distilled from sugar cane, which was very cheap and could be drunk, used as lighter fluid, or put into a Molotov cocktail.

They carted all that junk down to the beach and ferried it out to the boat in three trips, with only one funny incident. That was when Philip told Tony to be sure to tie the dink to the rail, and Tony told Philip that he better tie the dink to the rail, so they both climbed on board and the dink was headed for points west, blown by the wind at a speed

far greater than either of them could swim. But dunderheads always seem to live a charmed life. I suppose they would blunder into a mortal situation in early youth if they were not watched over by the gods. That can be the only reason for their reaching maturity. This time they were saved by a pleasant French fellow in one of the other boats at the anchorage. He hopped into his Avon, cranked up his outboard, and retrieved the dinghy for them. I could see Fatso on shore in the final stages of utter panic-cum-rage, calling them a pair of idiots and sundry other things while the dink was drifting off. Talk about the pot and the kettle!

The next day, after they did a little more business on the beach, they had another meal and decided to push off that evening. Fatso had wanted to take on some water, but it would have required a week of hard work to ferry out enough to make any difference and it was only about three-hundred and seventy miles to Fortaleza, on the north side of Brazil. We had enough water to get there.

You would think that a simple task, like leaving an open anchorage, could be accomplished without any fuss, but these turkeys managed to bungle even that. First, they started the engine so the boys at the bow could have an easier time pulling in the hook. The idea was to motor forward while they hauled in the chain, but they were so busy giving each other orders that Fatso over-ran and had to ease off. Then they set up a series of signals and managed to free the hook, but the skipper, thinking they had completed the job, set off for Fortaleza with twenty feet of chain and the anchor hanging off the bow, all of which could not be winched in with the boat heading west at five knots. So they stopped again and finally completed the job. If honest accounting were done, it would emerge that three man-hours had been required to leave Fernando and get us on our way to Fortaleza.

CHAPTER V

We left Fernando at 5:30 PM on the tenth of December with a wind steadier and brisker than we had had so far on the whole voyage. By noon the next day we had covered a hundred and twelve miles, which was a lot better than we had done on many a full day previously. I hoped Skin-head was happy to be tearing-along at such a pace. The next day we did a hundred and forty-eight and I remember wondering if they realized that we had a strong current pushing us. It would be just like Fatso to look at a log reading, showing an average speed of five knots, assume that his sun sight was incorrect, and only think about the current when we were parked next to the cathedral in down-town Fortaleza, three miles from the sea. But I needn't have worried. Not even those yo-yos could mistake the lights of a large city for anything else, and when we anchored off the yacht club early on the morning of the thirteenth we had covered the distance in two and a half days, for an average of one-hundred and fifty miles a day. And weren't they proud of themselves! They seemed to think it was the greatest accomplishment since Man invented the wheel. None of them stopped to think that a water-logged plank would have taken only a little longer with that current pushing it along.

Fatso had anticipated difficulties with the Brazilian authorities long before we arrived at Fortaleza. On a previous cruise he had been kicked out of the country twice for not having a visa, but each time they had allowed him ten days because he was in "distress," a condition that I personally believe to be a permanent part of his character. The strategy this time was to claim a shortage of water, which was true enough, and food, of which we had plenty. Thus we would be "in distress" and entitled to ten days in the country. That was one of the laws of the land, incorporated in the regulations governing the Policia in Fortaleza, which controlled immigration. Fatso knew all about that regulation, having seen it in the book while on the earlier cruise. The only trouble was that the Policia in Fortaleza knew nothing about it. They called their boss and asked him and, like most bosses, his ignorance was even greater than theirs. I thought it was unfair for a guy who was capable of bungling the simplest of tasks in the best of conditions to be faced with the handicap of superior ineptness by those in authority. He even pointed out to them that any crew on any Brazilian boat visiting South Africa had the run of the country as long as they were signed onto that boat. But people who can't keep up with the laws of their own country can hardly be expected to appreciate those of a foreign land and the upshot of the case was that we were to leave right away. Then we were told that we could stay long enough to take on water and buy food. We could have a few hours to do that. When the cop finally came out to the boat, he relented and gave us until "tonight" to leave. That was just enough time for some of the crew to rush into town and call Mommy-Lampie and Granny (who was Fatso's mother), buy some delicacies at the Supermercado, and get a bit of sleep. Rick and Jan stayed on board to guard the boat because there is a lot of thieving at that anchorage, and because Rick could fill the water tanks while he was guarding.

As an example of the human propensity to complication in general and my people's incompetence in particular, our stay at Fortaleza ranks foremost on the list. First of all, the skipper and the others had to go to the Port Captain's office to get permission to leave, which was interesting since they did not have permission to stay. Then they rushed to the telephone and called Granny in America. I think the only reason they got through

was because they called collect, which put the onus on her and she seems to be able to cope with life. Then they laid out about twenty-five bucks to call Mommy-Lampie in South Africa. They got through to Ouma who told them that Walda was out and that she, Ouma, couldn't hear a word they were saying. She then hung up. They wandered around the town for a while, enjoying the hustle and bustle and helping Fatso put down several of those ice-cold beers for which the Brazilians are so justly famous. They then made their way to the Supermercado to load up with goodies for the rest of the trip. By the time they got back to the boat Rick had filled the water tanks and had lost one of the oars of the dinghy. He had made another that was about as efficient as a square wheel, but which served the purpose more or less.

One of the things about the Fortaleza anchorage is that the holding ground doesn't. Twice that afternoon we dragged and had to reset the hook. Fatso sat on the terrace of the yacht club, drinking beer with an Englishman from one of the other boats at the anchorage, and watched TINA nearly sink another vessel down-wind of us. Rick, Tony, and Jan were on board at the time, with the dinghy tied to the rail, and they reacted in a manner in keeping with their individual characters. Tony jumped into the dink and rowed ashore for help, while Rick and Jan started up the engine and re-set the hook. By the time Tony got to the beach, the job was done, so, unwilling to have wasted a trip and always anxious to be of assistance, he remained to help Fatso drink beer.

Old Skin-head took over the job of guarding the boat that afternoon, giving Jan and Rick a chance to wander around the town for a few hours. His method of safeguarding the vessel was unique. For the first hour or so he sat below with the Englishman, killing a bottle of rot-gut. During the process he made a gift of the spare sextant to his guest whose own sextant had been stolen and who was about to set out for Antigua with only an RDFL to guide him. Obviously, Fatso and the Englishman were two of a kind. Then they left to have dinner on the Englishman's boat, as blatant a dereliction of duty as one could imagine. What if some thieves had come aboard and stolen me? What did he expect me to do if the anchor dragged? What would have happened if Philip had not already given me my dinner? Finally Fatso returned and fell asleep in the cockpit, reasoning that no thief would approach us if they saw him sitting there. I had to agree with him on this point. Since he had not trimmed his beard or cut his hair for several months and was wearing clothes that would have been rejected by any self-respecting pirate, he looked, in Tony's words, "like something that had escaped from a zoo."

The others came back to the ship at various times during the night. Tony collected a few bottles of his whiskey which he sold for an immense profit, but for which he was paid cruzeiros that he would have no time to spend and would fetch little on the money market of the next country we stopped at. Philip and Karin were back and forth getting money to spend on ice-cream for which they had developed a craving while at sea, and Rick and Jan walked the beach front and enjoyed themselves quietly.

The deadline the Policia had given Fatso for leaving, "tonight," arrived at six-thirty the following morning just as the anchor was dragging for the fourth time. The skipper set eight o'clock as our FTD, but since we had the engine going to re-set the hook, and since the anchor was up already, he figured we might as well push off. What great logic. I would not have been surprised if he had anchored again and waited for eight o'clock just to show the Policia a thing or two.

We motored out of Fortaleza, heading for Guadeloupe in the Caribbean. That was to be the end of the voyage for Rick and Jan who did not have a visa for the USA. They did not have a visa for Guadeloupe either, but that did not seem to bother them. As far as I could figure it out, Fatso, as skipper, would be responsible for their air fares home if he took them any place and left them there. I could imagine the old tight-wad's terror at the thought of having to fork out a few thousand bucks for something completely unrelated to booze or 'baccy. If he took Rick and Jan to the USA, the authorities would have a hold on him, but if they "jumped ship" in Guadeloupe, he would be long gone before anyone knew they were there. It sounded like marooning them to me, but I reflected that they were resourceful young people and would make out all right.

For the first few days we bombed along with a good breeze and a five-or six-knot current pushing us, making one-hundred ninety miles in one noon-to-noon period, which was a record for TINA. I had to be especially alert because off-shore oil rigs and their attendant service vessels kept popping up in our path. It took some getting used to, after having crossed an ocean where we might spot one ship every week or so, suddenly to sight seven during a two-hour watch. The rigs themselves were impressive and interesting, especially at night when the burn-off stood like a pale star above the sea. Not even our dozy crew could fail to be alerted by a beacon that was visible fifty miles away. What usually happened, however, was that they got so involved in looking at the rig that they ignored the service ships dashing about, bringing food, workers, equipment, and so on. I had to keep on my toes, I assure you.

But it was only a few days until that area was left behind and we were cruising again. I relaxed my vigilance, got more rest and spent more of my time looking for Flying fish. Things were back to normal. All that bothered me was the speed at which we were traveling and the rain that would appear for no good reason and get me wet. The first was an annoyance because I, unlike the others, did not want the voyage to end. The second was a grave inconvenience because had to spend a lot of hours cleaning myself up every time I was splashed, hours that could have been spent in constructive pursuits like eating and sleeping.

It was during this leg of the voyage that the sails began to give trouble. We had been sailing for about two months by then and the fitful winds we had experienced earlier had meant plenty of flopping and that had meant plenty of chafing. The hanks on the genoa had been worn pretty thin and the forestaysail was only hanging on by a few bits of line that Fatso had stuck on to hold the luff to the stay. Leave it to him to neglect buying spare hanks. Why spend a few bucks to do the thing right when you can wrap a sail tie around the stay and give the boat that totally improvised look: At this point we had a bilge pump held together by a few bolts and lots of luck, the mainsail had torn its boom track out and was held in place by lashings around the boom, and the fitting for the boom yang had broken and was--you guessed it--replaced by lashing.

Old Skin-head's formula for any breakage was "tie a rope on it." The amazing thing was that he was always so pleased with himself when he set up those improvisations. He called them "visible manifestations of an adaptable mind," but to me they were merely evidence of a lack of foresight. To top it all off, I knew that those improvisations would become permanent fixtures of the vessel. That was another of his philosophies: "If it works, don't touch it." For this reason we were sailing with two different cross-trees on the mast. One was a nicely shaped piece of wood that had

obviously been carefully made for this boat. The other, starboard cross-tree was a round dowel that appeared about as robust as a piece of spaghetti.

Fatso was fond of explaining why that unsightly abortion was the way it was. The original tree had broken at sea on an earlier cruise, and, over a period of two days, had been replaced by what we had now. The dowel had done the job for about fifteen thousand miles on that cruise and would probably get us to the USA, on this one, so it was a "visible manifestation" and would stay where it was until the ship went down. The fact that it spoiled the symmetry of the rigging was ignored in favor of having a souvenir to brag about.

And how he bragged about it! It was the dullest, longest-winded detail-ridden saga, filled with the horrors of working aloft that had ever been subjected to eight times. For one to imagine taking two days to stick that dowel in the socket and set up the rigging, it is necessary to know how Fatso approached any problem. First, he would attempt to convince himself that the breakage needn't be fixed at all. They could do without a cross-tree couldn't they? When even his understanding concluded that the mast would break in the first blow, he would pause, have a beer, and try to determine how the repair was to be made. That process would take several hours because there would be plenty of breaks for lunch, smokes, another beer, perhaps even a nap. By then it would be Tot Time, when the daily grog ration was passed out, closely followed by supper and nobody works aloft in the dark. One day gone and nothing done.

On the second day they would not get stuck into the Job right away because they would have to take a noon sight in a while to see where they had gone in the last twenty-four hours, during which time they had drifted aimlessly with all sails down. So they would sit around until it was ten o'clock in Hong Kong, which was beer time in the Atlantic, open a can, and wait to get the sight which would put them four miles from where they had been the previous day. Alarmed at having made so little progress, they finally climbed up and stuck the dowel in the socket, a process that required plenty of shouting of orders and dropping of tools onto the heads of those below. Having gotten the dowel in place, there would be another beer break before they set up the rigging and raised the sails, and then, at last, the job was done and they were moving again. Of course this triumph would cause Tot Time to be advanced an hour or so to allow them ample opportunity to celebrate their incredible prowess. So, there we were, stuck with that odd looking set of cross-trees and Fatso's boring tale.

His approach to the sails was of a like nature. In general it was too much like work to make changes either up or down. So what if it was only blowing ten knots and we needed the genoa up? It might increase in a day or so and then we'd just have to take it down. So what if it was pumping about thirty knots and we had everything up? It would probably ease off after a while. I admit that there were a couple of occasions when he did dash forward and drop a sail, but that was when we were hit by squalls and the boat was tearing along at nine knots, about to 'weak something serious and with the lee rail under a couple of feet of water. Even then, his dash was more like a brisk walk and the sail would probably stay down until long after the squall had left us.

The result of this procedure was that no maintenance was ever performed on the sails. They stayed up and pulled until they tore. Then there was a chance that they would be repaired, but it was even more likely that they would be stuck in a bag and left there until old Skin-head decided it was essential to have that particular sail up right

away, so he would dig it out and fix it. That is how it went with the genoa when one of the hanks wore through, causing an uneven pressure on the one above it, which caused, in turn, a six-foot tear across the head. Well, goodness me, we seem to have torn the jenny! So Fatso saunters forward, full speed ahead for him, takes down the genoa and raises the number one jib. Satisfied that he has done enough work for one day, he determines to start repairs the next day, if something more pressing doesn't turn up, like a chess game with Philip. The genoa stays in its bag for two days and only comes out when the wind has dropped to twelve knots and we are barely moving. Then everybody gets a lesson in sail repairs as they take turns sewing up the rip. It takes two days to stitch it together and half an hour to glue a patch over it with contact adhesive. The effort so exhausts them that they all take a break until the following day when, finally, they take down the lib and raise the genoa with much self-congratulation. The patch is a bright red stripe across the head of the sail and the hanks are bits of rope that will probably chafe through in no time, but the crew are all very proud of themselves. And it only took five days to get that sail up again!

If you think that is something, consider the courtesy flag they had raised when we came into Fortaleza. It took twelve-- count 'em--twelve days for them to summon up the energy to drop that ensign. We were fourteen hundred miles away from Brazil and still flying her colors!

When it wasn't pure, unalloyed laziness that caused problems, there was always Fatso's forgetfulness to insure a screw-up. Take the batteries, for example. He charged them every couple of days with the engine or the little Honda generator, but he forgot to check the water in them so that, wonder of wonders, there came a time when the lights were dim and the voltage meter was way down, and, o dear me, there seems to be something wrong with the batteries. Rick has a look and discovers that the bank that runs the ship's lights is dry. Of course the skipper had forgotten to buy any distilled water, so they pour in some from the ship's supply and then have to charge the batteries daily for a week or two before they build up enough acid to hold a charge.

Or take the drinking water as another example. If you want to know what having fun is, try ferrying a hundred gallons of water in a dinghy that you have to launch from a beach. You have to lug twenty gallons at a time across the sand, row a few hundred yards, hoist the stuff on board, and siphon it into the tanks. Those tanks consist of five twenty-gallon plastic bottles on each side of the ship. All the bottles are inter-connected and there is a valve amidships so that the two sets can be isolated from each other. Because Fatso had nothing to do with the design, it is a pretty good one. The valve amidships is kept closed until one set of tanks is exhausted and then opened to allow the water to flow into the empty bottles. That way you know when half your water has been used up. When filling the water is poured into only one tank and disperses naturally to all the others. So, while in Fortaleza, Fatso opened the valve and instructed Rick on the intricacies of the procedure. Then he went into town, thereby avoiding any involvement with the labor of getting the water to the ship. Poor Rick had to lug, launch, row, and hoist for three hours before the tanks were filled and when we left, Fatso forgot to close the valve. As soon as the sails were raised and the boat heeled, the water in the windward tanks flowed over to the other side and since that bank of tanks was full, there was nowhere for to go but into the bilges. Bags of panic! Where is all that water coming from? Pump, pump, pump on the Whale 25 that is held together by a few bolts and lots of

luck. Then Fatso tears up the sole and checks the stern tube, which has its usual dribble but does nothing to explain the gallons that had been sent into the ocean. That really sets the adrenalin going because there are no other places for water to enter the boat--no toilet, no sea-water intake. Fatso had cut those out and welded a plate in where they had been. Was there a hole in the hull? It was only by carefully ignoring the obvious answer to the problem that Fatso was able to spend forty-five minutes checking the hull for a leak, at last stumbling into stream coming from the leeward tanks. The light dawned, he shut the valve, and the ship was saved. A lot of the water that Rick had so laboriously brought out had been wasted and all because the skipper was too absentminded to remember the most basic precautions. To top it off, he was so relieved that we weren't holed and so proud of himself for having solved the problem that he declared an extraordinary Tot Time and dug out another bottle of rot-gut.

In spite of everything, we made reasonable time on the way to Guadeloupe, averaging about a hundred and twenty miles a day in weather that continued squally and produced more rain than I needed. At least the sails were getting clean and the washing hanging on the lifelines was well rinsed. We knew we were getting close when we met a tiny fishing boat with three men aboard, powered by a single outboard engine and headed for the middle of the ocean. Now, those were real seamen! They were at least fifty miles from the nearest land, in an open boat piled with gear, and tearing along at full throttle across six-foot seas. They made our lot look like a bunch of sissies. Of course, nothing would have induced me to get aboard with them.

The next day we sighted a little island that turned out to be Dominica. Tony immediately started his routine about unscheduled stops. Why couldn't we take a few days and have a look at Dominica? Where was Fatso's sense of adventure? Tony was told that the sense of adventure had been left in Cape Town and that the skipper had no intention of visiting any strange island without charts unless there was a major emergency. Tony figured his shortage of cigarettes was a major emergency, but it did not do him any good. We held course for Guadeloupe.

That evening saw us off Marie Galante and by midnight we were ghosting along in a mist that was so close to rain that it made no difference. Everything was dripping--the sails, the rigging, even Fatso's beard. When he came below to check the chart, he even dripped on me and I was inconvenienced to the extent that I had to change berths. Some people have no consideration.

By dawn we were off Deserado, a long, high skinny chunk of land that almost touches Guadeloupe, but the visibility was so bad that there was no sign of our destination. We could see about half a mile and then it was all misty grayness. I can assure you that it made me uneasy. All the previous landfalls had been straightforward. Both St. Helena and Fernando were the only spots of land in a big ocean and there was no mistaking them for anything else. If you saw a rock, that was what you were aiming for and you were there. Fortaleza was the same. It is the only large city on the coast so there was no danger of blithely sailing into the wrong bay and running onto that reef that guards, say, Recife. But this time we had already seen three islands and I would not have put it past Fatso to have been mistaken about any one of them, in spite of his confidence in his navigation. I was a trifle worried that he'd run us aground somewhere in Barbados while looking at the landmarks on the chart for Guadeloupe.

He certainly spent a lot of time with that chart. He would come charging below in

his oilskins, spattering water all over anybody near him, squinting through the droplets on the lenses of his glasses and spouting a lot of nonsense about compass bearings and back-bearings and how we were right here unless we were over there, in which case we should be on the lookout for a lighthouse on a reef. By the time the sun had burnt away some of the mist, we were committed and creeping along an invisible shore. We could see where we had been but not where we were going, and it was becoming apparent that old Skin-head might actually have been correct. Landmarks were emerging from the mist as we neared them and remained in sight behind us as we moved toward more grayness.

What was happening was that the easterly wind and the rising sun were dispersing the mist in an orderly and efficient manner, starting on the east side and moving westward at about the same pace we were going. Of course, I was the only one to recognize this phenomenon. The others kept babbling away about how strange it was to have clear skies astern and impenetrable fog ahead, Fatso was constantly cautioning the helmsman to stick to the given heading, and to concentrate on the compass, while Fatso himself looked out for hazards. Some lookout: There he stood with his glasses all fogged up, relying on a compass heading to bring safely in. When the mist left us, it did so in a hurry. One minute it was there and the next gone, to reveal, wonder of wonders, Guadeloupe! We were right where the skipper had said we were. Say what you will, I call it pure, blind luck. The gods look after mental defectives and drunks. Naturally our lot was so relieved and surprised to have done something right that they got out one more bottle of whiskey to celebrate our arrival.

We picked up a mooring at the marina in Pointe-a-Pitre that afternoon, which was the first time in two and half months that the boat had not been completely independent. At last, a stop with no dragging anchors for me to worry about! Here I would be safe. Here, too, I hoped that Philip, and Karin would be able to replenish the sand for my box. The supply was getting dangerously low and the daily ration had been diminishing to the extent that after three pees the box was awash and I had to balance myself on the edge of the tray or I'd get my feet wet. The crew thought my balancing act very funny. Small minds are easily amused.

CHAPTER VI

Our stay at Guadeloupe was to last a week, so Fatso had the crew put on the sail covers and rig the awning for the first time on the trip. That awning certainly made my stay more pleasant. I could sit under its shade in the afternoon and survey the activity around me in serene comfort and when showers came fumbling up from out of nowhere I remained dry without having to dash below. I was alone pretty much of the time because everybody spent most of their days ashore, running around in circles and stuffing their faces with the local equivalent of junk food. The favorite repast was a sandwich made from half a French loaf and loaded with cheese.

Naturally, the first day was taken up with "business" -- Fatso's word for the couple of minor tasks he managed to spend the whole day completing. The big deal was clearing in through Customs. There was lots of talk about being kicked out of the island because South Africans tend to be disliked in most places with large black populations. But old Skin-bead went ashore, filled out a form for a very laconic inspector, and came back with the passports stamped. Then the whole crew went to the office and paid deposits on keys to the showers so they could wash off two weeks' accumulation of salt. This seemed to make them feel so good that they had to stop and have a cold beer before strolling into the town to change money- acid make phone calls.

That is what they did, and it took them the entire day! They returned to the boat that evening in a state of exhaustion, feeling virtuous because they had accomplished so much. The only interesting bit of information they brought with them was that Fatso's uncle, Greg, would be flying out to join us for the final leg of the voyage, replacing Rick and Jan.

I was going to miss those two. They had been staying on the boat for six months before we set sail, living on odd jobs they found around the yacht club, and had, of course, impressed their mark on the vessel. That is one of the inevitable facts of existence. Inanimate things take on the aura of the living, a truth we cats are well aware of, and Rick and Jan would be remembered by what they had left behind. That would include physical reminders as seen in many little lobs, usually unfinished, that they had undertaken to pay for their lodging, like the forecandle liner, for example, that was nearly fifty percent complete. And the baggie wrinkles they created that adorned various strategic parts of the ship. They had learned how to make those anti-chafing devices from Fatso, who, as usual, had a unique system for the lob.

Step one: wait for a rainy day when you can't work outside. That is not to imply that there was much work done outside on sunny days. The rain only made it possible to procrastinate with virtue. Step two: make coffee. On a blustery, wet day in Cape Town one needs something hot to drink. Step three: Hot is good, but too hot isn't, so add whiskey to cool down the coffee; Step four: take a break. It doesn't do to rush into things. Step five: assemble the materials, such as segments of rope, you will need to make the baggies. Step six: Repeat steps two and three. Step seven: By now it is Tot Time and too late to start working so we might as well pack all the junk away and go over to the yacht club for a beer. Step eight: repeat step one. Lest any doubtful mind suspect that I am exaggerating, let it be remembered that Rick and Jan were on board for six months of a Cape Town winter, during which there were plenty of rainy days, and managed to construct four baggie wrinkles. They were going to make a few more at sea, but they

didn't have the time.

While we waited for Greg to arrive, the crew amused themselves with whatever pursuits appealed. Tony was blotto most days, due to excesses of the previous evening. Rick and Jan divided their time between packing the belongings they had accumulated while on the boat and looking for work around the marina. Their plan was to find a boat that needed fixing and on which they could live while they did the job. They needed what they called "on the job lodging". Fatso in an unprecedented burst of energy, washed the dishes that had been cluttering up the aft deck since the day previous to our arrival, and serviced the batteries. That was a total of two hours' work and he stretched it over two days so as not to wear himself out.

Only Philip and Karin undertook an important task. They began a search for sand for my box. Their first attempt was not very satisfactory. They lugged about forty pounds of earth a mile and a half and poured it into the big drum lashed to the stern rail, but it was clayey, rocky soil, unsuitable for a litter box. Then they got smart and rowed the dinghy over to a little beach across from the marina where they loaded a good supply of nice, fine-grained sand. That they did not realize, however, was that the beach they had chosen belonged to the property to which it was attached and the sand had been put there at great expense by the owners. When the irate housewife came rushing out to deliver a torrent of rebuke in rapid French which neither comprehended, the kids could do nothing but enact their apologies and row back to the boat. They did not understand why she was so angry, but a look around the perimeter gave the explanation. There was only that one little stretch of beach on an otherwise rocky shore and it could not have gotten there naturally. Luckily they had loaded almost enough sand to fill the drum. I would not be inconvenienced.

When the day of Greg's arrival came, all but Tony, confined to his berth in a stupor, hitch-hiked out to the airport to meet him and escort him back to the boat. It was strange for me to be suddenly confronted by a civilized human being for the first time in two and a half months. Here was a character who shaved every day, who had buttons on his clothing, and shirts that had been ironed; whose shoes actually shined, and who smelled like soap and water, just like the people I remembered back in Hermanus. It was a shock, I can tell you but I realized that in a short time at sea he would degenerate into the same disgusting state as the other bums. There is no escaping the pressures of our environment and only a truly dedicated soul, like me, can resist the temptation to conform.

Greg had arrived safely in Guadeloupe, but his luggage had taken a side trip to Martinique. It took them two days of heavy telephoning to track it down and another trip to the airport to collect it. During that time, Tony decided to leave the ship so that he could have a look at some of the other islands. He did not want to leave Fatso short-handed, he said, and for once old Skin-head was at a loss for words for several seconds. I could see his mind attempting to formulate a diplomatic response to the effect that Tony's contribution to the voyage had been so minute that his absence would make an insignificant difference to the running of the ship. In the end the skipper simply said that we would manage without Tony somehow.

On the day before our departure Fatso cleared out through Customs with much trepidation. He was leaving half his crew ashore illegally and he expected the inspector to make some sort of objection. But that gentleman was only concerned with his paperwork.

If he had the correct forms filled out, he was happy. He didn't care what was on the forms. He was Fatso's kind of official.

We were going to pull over to the fuel dock and load up with diesel and water that evening. The idea was to make an early start next morning, before the wind came up, so that we would not have to motor against it for the entire thirty miles it would take to clear the island. As usual, Fatso wanted to get out into the open sea, leaving the islands to port so that he would not have to worry about bumping into the of them. So they started the engine, pulled the throttle, and the handle came off! Well, fancy that! The handle is broken! They spent an hour or so trying to attach the handle to the cable, fruitlessly, and by then the fuel dock had closed so they had a tot and went ashore for dinner.

In the morning they improvised a system that would enable them to control the ship and we putt-putted over to get our fuel. They filled the tanks and used the last of their Francs to get some pop for the kids and some beer. Jan, Rick, and a very bleary-eyed Tony were there to say goodbye and they wasted a lot of time shaking hands and taking pictures. When we finally got away it was nine-thirty and a glance at the trees on the hill above showed that the wind had come up and we would be battling as soon as we left the shelter of the marina. We would initiate Greg with a vengeance to the delights of sailing on TINA.

And that we did. It was blowing about thirty knots, right on the nose, when we got out into the bay. Motor-sailing against that wind and the considerable chop it set up had Greg hanging over the leeward rail in no time and even Fatso found it difficult to keep his beer can from tipping over. We were bashing into steep, short seas that sent sheets of spray, and some green water, the entire length of the boat, which cleaned the side decks nicely, but also soaked everyone on board. Except me. I had sense enough to stay below in Karin's berth. Things began to get really hairy when we encountered a few of the floats the local crabbers attach to their traps when they set them. The floats were small, white polyurethane balls which could not be seen in the chop until they were only ten or twelve feet away from the bow. That was all we needed at the time. If we got one of those lines around the prop, we would be in real trouble. We might even find ourselves dragging a basket full of crabs to the US. As the floats became more numerous, Fatso gave the wheel to Karin and went forward to stand up on the pulpit and direct us around the hazards. Soon we were dodging all over the bay as Fatso, with both feet on the top rail of the pulpit kind hanging on to the forestay with one hand behind his back, gestured frantically to port, changed hands, and with equally wild excitement pointed to starboard. Poor Karin was spinning that wheel like someone possessed and getting plenty of encouragement from Philip who gassed on verbally the directions to indicate "Left hand down. Left hand down. Left hand...Right hand down. Right hand down. Right hand down!"

It took Fatso half an hour of this zagging to realize that we were not getting anywhere, which passes as instant recognition for him. What little progress we made on a zig would be lost on a zag, and some of the larger seas would compound the problem by pushing us backwards a few feet. I figured that if the wind didn't ease, we could spend a week or two in that bay dodging pots. Also, it was pretty hard, hanging on up there on the pulpit so I wasn't surprised when Fatso gave the lob Philip and came dripping below to have a look at the chart. He studied it for a while, decided that we could go around to the west of Guadeloupe and then north to the Anegada Passage, which is the route most sail

boats take and which he would have known about if he had done his homework and studied the chart while we were peacefully tied up in the marina, instead of waiting until we were being tossed around like clothes in a dryer and about to rob some crabber of his gear. Fatso came on deck and made a lightning decision, about ten minutes later, to turn and take the alternate route.

The change was immediate. We eased sheets and were on a comfortable reach in seconds, bombing along under sail only and self-steering nicely. The chop that had been pushing us around was now helping us on our way and we were surfing down the larger seas. It was such a pleasant sensation that I came up on deck to congratulate Fatso. He had done the right thing and I hoped to encourage future efforts in the same direction. I sat on his lap for a while, until he spilled beer on my back, and then went below. You can't make a silk purse out of a turkey.

It was dusk when we rounded the south end of Basse Terre and turned northwards to sail in the lee of the island on a flat sea only rippled by the good breeze. It was the most pleasant sail of the entire trip. The ship was as steady as a railroad car and moving at a constant four knots. We could watch plenty of life going on ashore about three miles off--cars running up and down hills boats heading in for their moorings, lights beginning to come on, and there was a stillness broken only by the rippling of the bow wave. It was idyllic until Fatso started shouting "T-t-t-Tot Time!" and ruining a perfect evening with typically insensitive behavior. Greg was not feeling well enough to join him, but that didn't seem to bother Fatso in the least.

The crew change naturally brought about some alterations in the routine of the ship, although they were only minor. With only four bodies to share them, the night watches became three hours instead of two and there were no more days off. The dishwashing chore and the cooking came around a trifle more quickly for each person, but otherwise all was the same. When the wind died during the night and our progress slowed to a crawl, it did not concern me at all. We were not making as good time as we would have had we gone outside the islands, but it was certainly easy sailing.

We advanced leisurely for two days until we crossed through the Anegada Passage and moved out into the open sea. It was a time of great nervousness for Fatso because the island Anegada is a flat little blob, visible from no more than five miles away, with a reef extending some ten miles around it. When you run onto the reef, you know you're getting close. We spent a great deal of time at panic stations, giving lots of contradictory orders, and generally getting on everybody's nerves until he was satisfied that we had gotten safely through. That was when the island was about twenty miles behind us and we had not come close to the reef. I didn't need to see it. I could smell it, but he had no confidence in my judgment.

Out in the open sea and over his seasickness, Greg was in his element. Talk about a navigator! He was always playing around with the sextant. I had thought Fatso was bad enough. He took a sight every day, except when he missed the time for one reason or another, usually laziness. But Greg was busy with sun sights, star sights, moon sights, and making hundreds of calculations which in no way produced any useful information. They were having fun, I suppose, but I knew where we were going.

They did get busy on the day Fatso decided to pump out the lazarette, which is an area at the stern where they load unnecessary junk they are too stupid to throw away. The hatch for this area does not fit tightly and some of the water that we take over the bow

usually splashes in as it runs by and off the stern. We could hear it sloshing in there as the boat rolled and Fatso spent three days saying that it should be pumped out before he got around to raising the hatch. They pumped and pumped, sending gallons of smelly water over the side, but the level in the lazarette did not change. Oh, dear me, whatever is wrong here' They had to load all of the junk out of the lazarette and then found that the exhaust pipe, which runs through the lazarette and out the stern at the waterline, was rusted through. Every time the ship dipped the stern, a fresh supply of ocean came rushing in. Every time the stern was raised, a bit would run out. Fatso had a few strips of old inner tube that he had been carrying around for a year or two. They were meant to be used to wrap the prop shaft and seal off the stern tube, should the need arise. He dug them out and wrapped the exhaust pipe which stopped the leak so they could pump the lazarette dry, but that did not solve the problem. As soon as they started the engine, the inner tube would melt and the leak would be back. They did the only thing possible in such a situation. They poured a couple of tots of Guadeloupean rum arid sat in the cockpit to discuss the problem. That took them the rest of the day.

The next day they spent a few hours making a splint out of a piece of aluminum pipe that had been lashed to the deck and saved for no apparent reason. Then Greg jumped over the side and pounded a wooden plug into the exhaust pipe. That kept the Water out while Fatso wrapped the pipe with fiber-glass impregnated with some gunk that was meant to be used to plug small holes in mufflers. Then he stuck on the splints and pulled them up tight with clamps. Greg went over the side again and pulled the wooden plug out of the exhaust, they started the engine, and all gathered around the hatch to watch the patch. I remember thinking at the time that one of two things was about to happen: a) the patch would hold, and Tot Time would be advanced so they could congratulate themselves in style; b) the patch would not hold, and Tot Time would be advanced so that they could have another conference to determine a more satisfactory method of repair.

They watched the patch for a while, and it seemed to be okay, so event (a) occurred. By the time the engine had charged the batteries, the gunk had set hard and when they switched off, they saw that there was only a minute drip coming from the pipe. That they could live with, so they congratulated themselves some more. Here we go again, I thought to myself.

That patch was sure to become another 'visible manifestation" and I would have to listen to the story of how it got there more times than was healthy for my sanity. I could see that Greg would be just as bad. His swim to bung the exhaust was sure to become the heroic action of the decade. The sails had been dropped, he was wearing a safety harness tied to the rail, and there was a life-ring on a rope thirty yards astern, in case the boat started to walk away. The watery part of the job took about thirty seconds to complete, but there he was saying that he was glad no sharks had come along. Two and a half months at sea had not shown us a single shark anywhere in the South Atlantic and he was glad that none had come along!

For about two weeks we inched our way towards Port Canaveral, with erratic winds and lots of calm. The going was so slow that a fifty mile day was hailed as real progress. We saw a few ships now and then and even spoke to a couple on the radio, but usually no one answered our call. The traffic got very heavy as we passed north of the North-east Providence Passage. Fatso had lots of fun during one of his watches when

there was a ship coming across his bow, another crossing his stern, and a third passing to starboard simultaneously--all at once--at the same time--together we could hear the pitter-patter of big flat feet as he fumbled forward to check on one and then aft to watch the other two. I could tell at a glance that they were all going to miss us but he had convinced himself that the only real danger at sea was shipping so he spent an hour rushing around in a panic. The ships passed, and we proceeded quietly on our way.

We ran into a lively gale north of the Bahamas. It was full of rain and had around forty knots of wind, but the direction was good for a change. It came roaring out of the northeast and tossed us around for a while until Greg convinced Fatso to drop the mainsail. Old Skin-head was really a picture when that suggestion was mooted. He was in the cockpit, protected from the weather by the canvas dodgers and envying the speed we were making down pretty good-sized seas. To bring down the main he would have to get out in the cold and wet and his fun would be at an end. It was only when it was clear that Greg could barely control the ship that, Fatso wandered out on deck and dropped the sail. Then we continued much more comfortably under the little forestaysail alone.

The gale lasted only three days and was replaced by a quiet southeast breeze that barely moved us. The sea was calm and flat and we sat there and rattled the gear and even spent an hour or two motoring while the engine charged the batteries. That was an unusual procedure. Previously Fatso would run the engine in neutral to get his charge because it would use less fuel to deliver the same charge with no load on, and also because it was necessary to steer the boat under power with more concentration than was needed under sail. Both those reasons were important to a tight-wad with a bad case of laziness. He supposed that he changed his habit because we were getting close to port where he could buy more fuel with Greg's money and Philip was doing the steering.

By that time Philip and Karin were talking about the chocolate and ice cream that awaited them and Greg and Fatso were constantly referring to cold beer, red meat, and salads, which struck me as a disgusting combination. At one point we were one hundred and seventy-five miles from Port Canaveral and they were anticipating the enjoyment of those delights in two days. The next noon sight showed we had made only twenty miles, so there were still two days to wait. But at four the next morning Greg called Fatso up to show him the glow of shore lights and reported sighting a buoy. Could it be that our hot-shot navigator had screwed up? Yes, indeed. He re-worked figures from the previous night and found that his position was correct but he also discovered that he had plotted it a degree to the east. He was sixty miles off and had been sleeping the sleep of the righteous while we headed straight for the beach. Twit!

Our approach to port Canaveral was made in thick mist which gave a visibility of about a mile. We made several course alterations, chasing after markers that turned out to be fishing boats, until Fatso got out the RDF and set a course on the beacon. Then it was putt-putt for the entire day, with all of us on deck in the rain because the exhaust pipe had fractured near the engine and the interior of the boat was a gas chamber. I was very uncomfortable until I found a sheltered spot under the dinghy and curled up on a coil of rope. I stayed there until we tied up at the port next to a place that processed fish and Philip took me below so that I would not "run away." What nonsense. I would not run anywhere, but that was the first time the boat was alongside the shore in three months and I wanted to have a look around.

That was the twenty-third of January and three months to the day from our

departure from Cape Town. How the old slob gloated! "I told you we wouldn't do it in under three months, didn't I? Well, we sure didn't." You would have thought he had planned it, the way he carried on. If we had had ten knots more wind in one day at any time in the voyage, or if we had left earlier from any of the ports we stopped at, we would have been under the three month limit. As it was, we had taken three months, but our actual sailing time was only seventy-seven days, so the old idiot was really wrong, after all.

He was right about one thing, 'though. The seaworthiness of our vessel was always strongly doubted by longshore loafers. They would take one look at the old scow, with the rust bleeding down her topsides and the various "manifestations" scattered about her rigging, and then make unbelieving noises. The first people we encountered at Port Canaveral were no different. "You came from Africa in that" was the incredulous exclamation of an elderly gentleman who helped us tie up, thereby confirming Fatso's prediction that that reaction could be expected. Naturally, I glowered at the gentleman for his insult. Ours is a very seaworthy craft. It is just that she doesn't look like one because of Fatso's improvisations and failure to maintain things. People who can't see past the surface imperfections should keep mouths shut.

It took five minutes to tie up and three to get some beer from a store next to the quay. The kids were stuffing chocolate down their throats with alarming speed while Fatso was at the telephone, calling Granny to tell her that we had arrived. forty minutes and two six packs later, Mommie-Lampie came driving and they all went out for the red meat and salads. It was nice to have the boat to myself after all that hullabaloo.

The next morning they cleared in with Customs and started up the river to our final destination, Titusville. It was a cold, windy day, blowing directly from where we wanted to go, so we had to motor the whole way, which kept the salon and forecastle full of exhaust fumes. Fatso kept repeating that he was glad the pipe was broken because we would arrive with no cockroaches surviving the gassing. There we were, freezing to death on deck in that wind, and he's happy to be killing bugs! Typical!

We tied up at the marina in Titusville that afternoon, helped by a welcoming committee of family and friends and two reporters from the local paper. There was lots of fuss taking pictures and greeting each other and more than enough ridiculous speculation about me being pregnant. Okay, I had put on a few pounds, but anybody could see that I am a Tom. I got so fed up that I determined to disown them all and my first steps ashore took me directly to a neat little sloop on the other side of the dock. I went aboard to see if there was any chance of going on another cruise, but Philip came bounding after me and stuffed me into a car.

We went to Granny's house where we were to remain until Fatso found a place for us to live, and there was that white cat who had flown over with Ouma and Mommie-Lampie. She had not changed a bit. She was still howling for attention, still sitting on any lap she could find, still too fussy about her meals to be believed. She did not even have the decency to accord me the respect that was my due for having sailed all that way across the ocean--for having, in fact, been solely responsible for the safe conclusion of the voyage. I batted her around a bit but it didn't do any good. She would always be a frivolous hussy, incapable of learning anything useful.

A final degradation occurred that evening. In keeping with the human propensity to make mountains out of the most insignificant mole hills, my lot had dreamed up a kind

of loose association to give themselves status that they didn't deserve. Because they had completed a voyage of at least seven thousand nautical miles, they saw fit to call themselves "Real Old Salty Dogs" and would append the initials ROSD after their names, in the erroneous belief that this added class to their existence. That was okay for them, but when they conferred the honor on me, I nearly left them for good.

Salty Dog indeed!

NOTE

Chris is alive and well and living in Titusville. He spends most of his time pondering on the mysteries of existence from a perch on top of a car in the driveway of his new home. There he is able to keep an eye on the neighborhood and to insure that everything runs smoothly. The area's cats stay out of his way and dogs that cruise past never come within ten feet of him unless they fail notice him. That offense they only commit once. He has communicated the intelligence that he is merely waiting for the day when Fatso stops fooling around, trying to earn a living, and gets the boat ready for another cruise. Chris will condescend to accompany the crew.