

... So here am I, adrift at sea, being carried out further, like many thousands before me and, like them, with scant hope of rescue...



... How ironic... a gorgeous tropical night that people dream of... and here I am enjoying the cool breeze, knowing this will probably be my tomb... nobody knows I'm here... I'm completely helpless against the elements... wind, waves, and currents headed out to sea, and I am the unwilling passenger...

... then around midnight I heard voices on the hand-held VHF... I broke in and explained my situation... they were passing tugs towing barges, they radioed the Coast Guard and a boat was being sent out to pick me up...

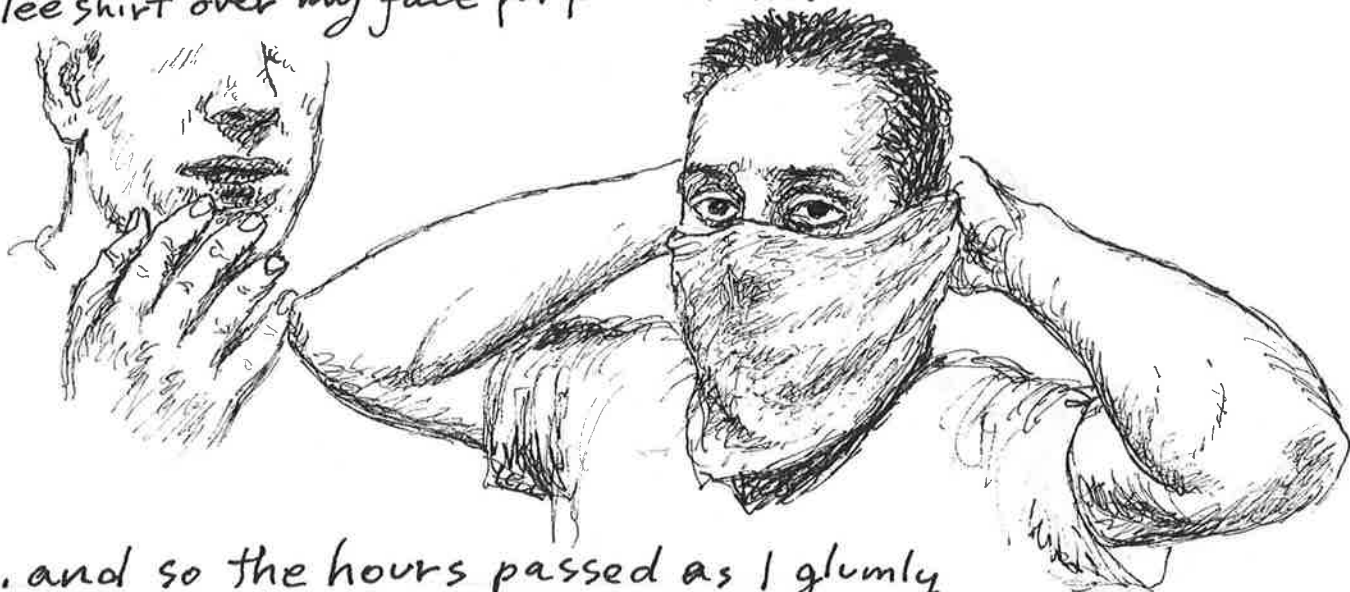


yes, yes,
all right!
I'm not
gonna die
tonight!

There followed a six hour comedy of errors that would have been funny if my life weren't dependent on it... I kept telling them "I'm due west of St. George's, just come out on a 270° bearing, you can be here in 15 minutes, but they didn't leave the harbor..." "There's a light over there, maybe that's him"... No, No, I'm not in the harbor, I'm 5 or 6 miles out... and another mile or more every hour



Finally the sun came, my VHF battery was exhausted and all communication was lost... if they couldn't find me when we were in contact they weren't likely to find me now... within an hour the terrific glare of the sun and its reflection off the water had burned my lower lip, so I tied a spare Tee shirt over my face for protection..



... and so the hours passed as I glumly pondered my fate... it would take a miracle to get me out of this, and I've never counted on miracles yet... I thought about the thousands of my fellow castaways over the centuries, many disappearing without a trace, leaving their families the mystery of their disappearance, and I thought of Dianne and my sons, they would never know what happened to me... I would just become another statistic...

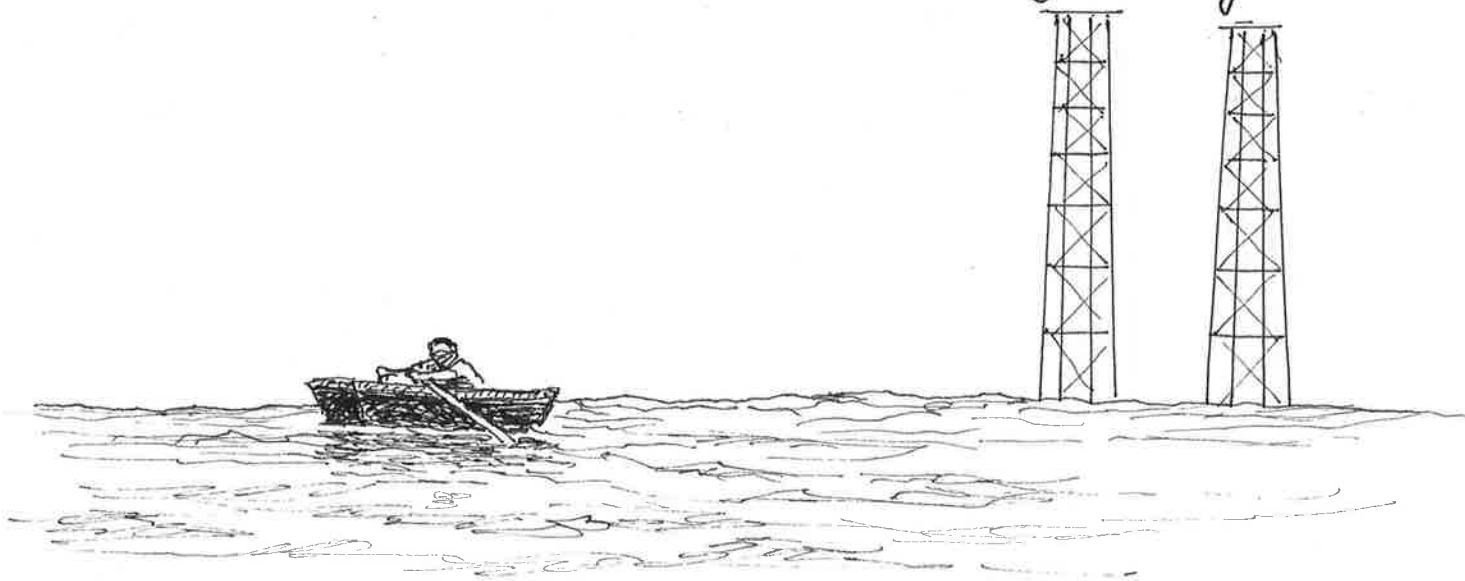
... all about me just the cruel hot rays of the sun, and the blinding glare off the sea...



What were my feelings? Sadness and anger... an overwhelming deep sadness that it was all going to end here... a matter of days... and a frustrating, impotent anger... at the immigration officer, yes, but mainly at myself, another stupid blunder in a life full of stupid blunders... Once, a sailboat, northbound, at least 5 miles away... just for something to do I stood up and waved my red life jacket... ...gave me something to laugh about, at least...



... looking around my eye caught something I hadn't noticed before: towers rising out of the water, looked like electrical towers, built of very light, very thin steel, almost too thin to stand, about a mile away, I'd guess, though it's hard to estimate distance out here... all right, let's go...

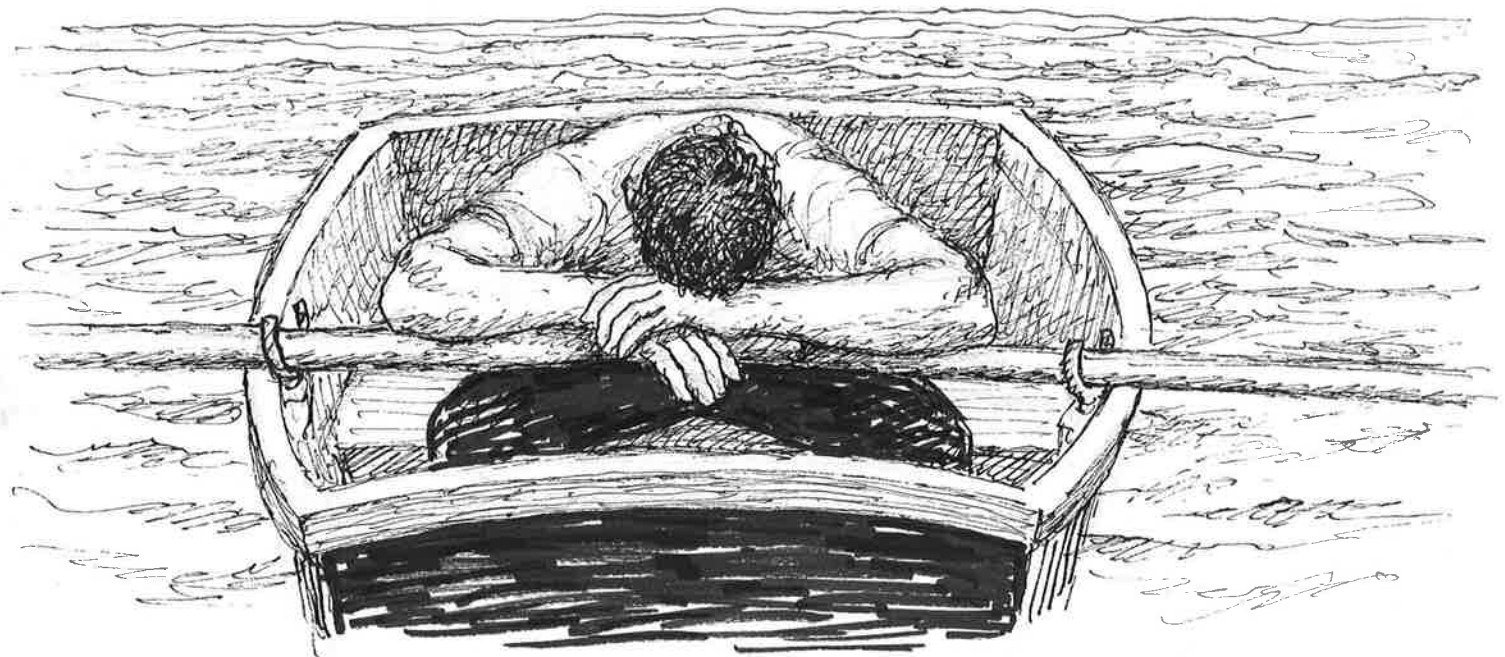


I kept turning back to look at them as I rowed, to be sure they were really there, that I wasn't imagining them, and every time I looked there they were, beckoning me...

... until the time I turned around to look...
and they were gone



... and if they had been real, what then? I could tie up
and avoid being carried out to sea, but I'm still in a
disabled boat that's taking on water... back to drifting...



dreaming...

...remembering the night in December, 1999 when I hit a reef at Rum Cay in the Bahamas... I thought that would be the night I lost my boat, and lost my life...



big foaming waves coming in, lifting the boat and dropping it again and again... Would she be beaten to death in this unforgiving hell?



a loud crash behind, I turn and see the rudder lift out and disappear into the sea...

every time a wave lifted the boat the
wind pushed it a few feet across the
reef till I soon found that we were
clear of it and in deeper water...

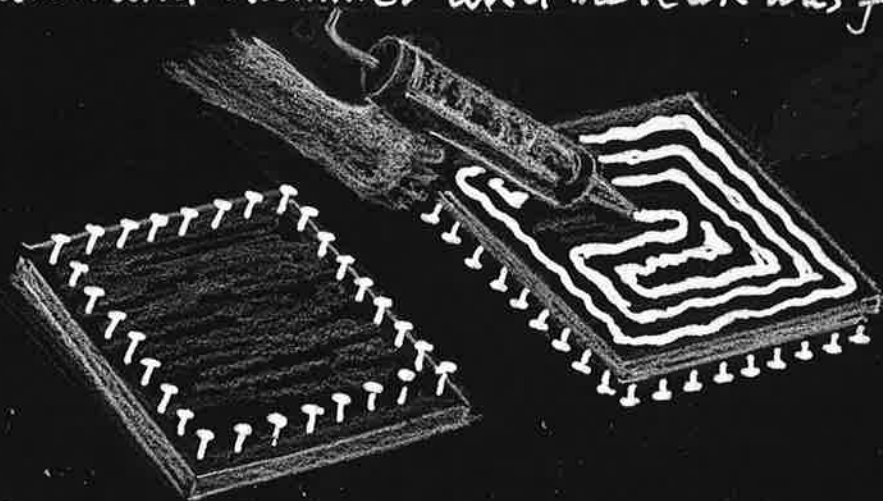
I put out an anchor and went below to
assess the damage...



the hull had been breached, water
was coming in, slowly, so we were
towed into the marina...



my friend Thomas dove on the boat to find the leak... I made a plywood patch, started nails all round the edge, slathered plenty of 3100 goop on it and Thomas went down again with patch and hammer and the leak was fixed

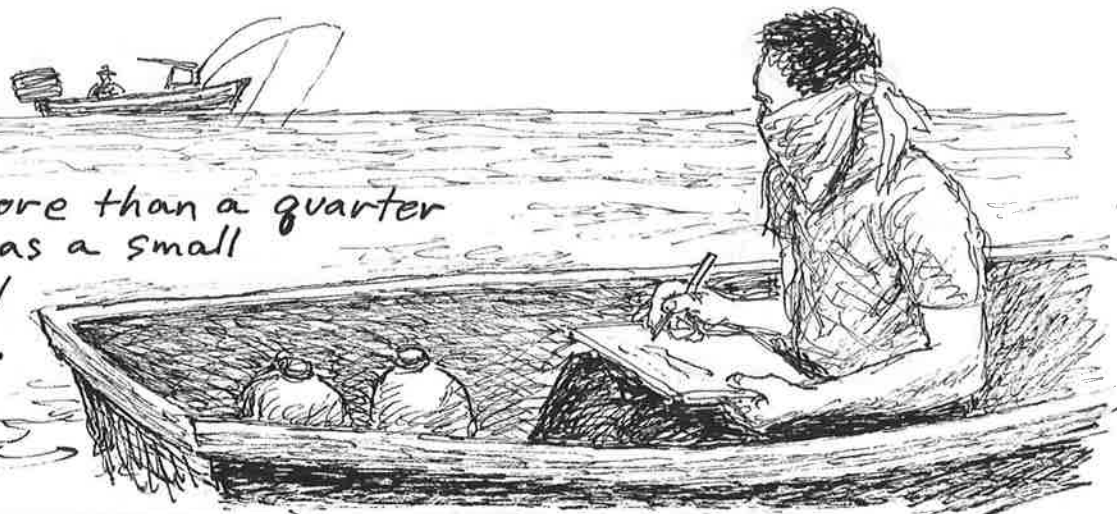


I bought some plywood and a 2x4 from the marina and made a new rudder and tiller, not pretty like the originals but serviceable...



Oh poor me, I'm a'gonna die out here all alone... I wanted to laugh at myself, make fun of myself... but my agony was real, embarrassed by my maudlin inclinations, yet I was genuinely distressed and had to honestly admit my profound sadness to myself. So I started to write a farewell letter to my Dianne and to my sons and I let the sadness flow... maudlin and uncensored... when I looked up...

there, not more than a quarter mile away was a small brightly painted fishing skiff...



Maybe the Gods would pull me out of this after all... But first I must get his attention, this is my last chance...

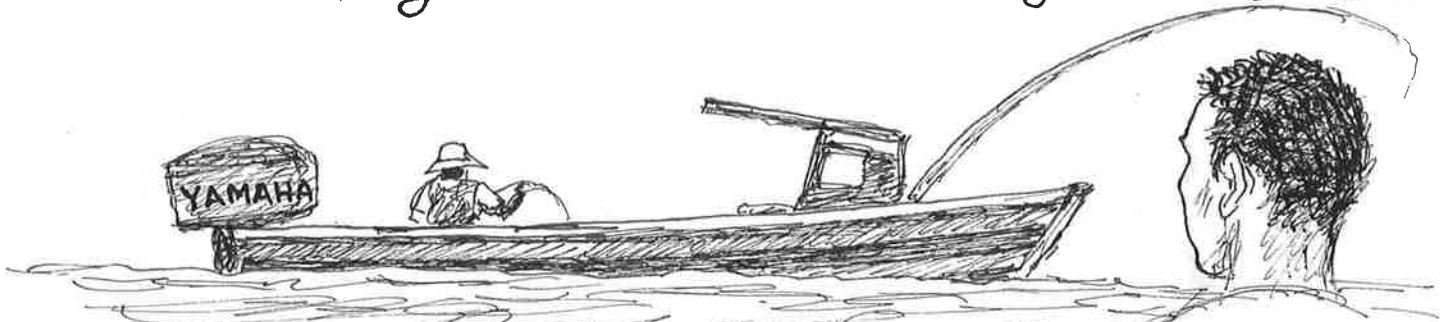
**HELLO
HELLO BROTHER
OVER HERE
PLEASE!**

I knew he couldn't hear me over the sound of his large outboard engine... nevertheless...



He was getting closer all the time and now I could see that he was sitting facing away from me, coiling line...

I've just got to get his attention, I even consider jumping in and swimming over to him, but that might backfire...



Oh God! he'll never hear me over the roar of that motor... I can't let him get away... what can I do???



I can't believe this, he's so close I can almost reach out and touch him, he still can't hear me - yell louder!



I'm a dead man here
unless you can take me
back to join the living

I don't know why those guys
couldn't find you
last night...
you were
telling them
right where
you were



you were out here a long time...
you must have gotten a real hunger...
Here, chow down on this...



I still don't know if it's because
I hadn't eaten for 2 days, or if
that was the most delicious mango
the world has ever known...

Well let's tie up your dinghy, climb aboard
and we'll get you back to the
land of the living...



In the 50 years I've fished these waters I've picked up 4
people who would have died out here, 2 fishermen and 2
yachties. You're my 5th. By the way my name is Benedict Thomas



I never did see Ruby again... she now lives on in memory,
mine and those fortunate others whose lives included her
in one way or another... and she has joined the hallowed
ranks of many another gallant ship that dared to the
perilous deeps... and, like them, she paid the price for it...