

*August 11*

*Wind: SE 15-20 knots. Heading: 170M. Position: 13°57'51"S 148°52'12"E*

“WHAT ARE YOU looking forward to right now, April?”

I peer at her through the camcorder lens. Wet towels, tee shirts, and flapping underwear form a narrow corridor at the end of which she perches on the pedal seat.

“A baked p’tata with sour cream—lots and lots of sour cream—and a big green salad, with t’mata. And blue cheese dressing.”

“You mean a po-ta-to and to-ma-to?” I tease, stressing the British pronunciation.

“U-huh. Boy, wouldn’t that be good.” Closing her eyes, April stretches out her hand as though reaching for a mirage. “I can see it, almost taste it.”

“You better get pedalling, then, ‘cos all we’ve got left are two onions, some rancid garlic, and the remains of The Cabbage, which is starting to look a bit nasty.”

For the last 48 hours, April has bled continuously, depleting her of life-sustaining fluids and increasing the risk of isotonic dehydration. She’s also run out of sanitary pads. With no other clean, absorbent material available, she’s resorted to cutting up the sweat-encrusted towels we use to line the pedal seat, adding infection as a possible complication. The only good news is a temporary lull in her seasickness accompanied by a renewed interest in food. I jump at the opportunity to get some down her. Taking stock of the available ingredients, I give the meal options.

“It’s either curry, curry, or curry. So what’s it going to be?”

“Curry sounds good.”

“Excellent choice.”

Together with the last of the veggies, I use two cans of tomatoes, one can of kidney beans, and a few sticks of bean curd. I add walnuts, raisins, dried apricots, pepper, one cup of seawater, and a dash of curry powder for taste but not enough to aggravate her stomach. The result is a big communal stockpot, a refuelling bowser we can dip into whenever we need energy.

I take the first graveyard shift. Around midnight, I feel the pedal system tighten. The propeller shaft shears a moment later, and the cranks spin free.

This is the first time a pedal unit has failed at night. It’s bad enough trying to fix one in daylight with heavy seas pummelling the boat. In darkness, and the wind gusting forty knots, it’ll be a nightmare. Lying beam-on to the waves, *Moksha* starts to corkscrew, and waves crash through the open hatch. A shaft of feeble yellow light from my headlamp provides the nearest thing to illumination.

Trying not to wake April, I lift the unit free of the stainless box, remove The Dog’s Bollocks collar, and set about detaching the grease cap from the bottom bracket using a pair of Channellock pliers. It’s well and truly jammed, welded by corrosion. Frustrated, I give it a good yank. The thing comes away with a great sucking PLOP! followed by a deluge of emulsified grease spewing into my lap.

Then the headlamp dims, flickers, and dies completely.

I just sit there for a minute, mute with disbelief. The puddle of oil slides into my crotch before joining the pool of water sloshing around my ankles. The lubricant quickly spreads, forming a mini slick that slurps and gurgles wickedly in the darkness. A flashback to the Atlantic reminds me of what to expect for the remainder of the voyage. Grease will become our constant companion,

finding its way into our food, hair, ears, clothes, and sleeping bag.

Spare headlamp batteries are in the sleeping compartment. Halfway across the cabin, I lose my footing and nearly pitch head first into the Rathole with April. She wakes to a catalogue of hissing profanity.

“Is there anything you need help with?” she murmurs groggily.

As it happens, there is. I need a decent light to do the repair, and the brightest one we have is the halogen lamp on the camcorder. A minute later, April is sitting gingerly on the passenger seat (she has sores on her backside now), holding the camera as steady as conditions will allow.

“Might as well roll tape while you’re at it,” I tell her.

The propeller has to be separated from the broken shaft and then fitted to one of the replacement pedal units from the stern compartment. *Moksha* continues to wallow, and water crashes over the side. With no spare hands for bailing, the slick rises to our knees.

“It’s like trying to fix a lawnmower in your living room,” I explain to the camera. “Except the place is flooded, the walls and the furniture are all covered in motor oil, and the room’s going round and round like a fairground ride on steroids.”

April stares intently at the LCD screen, keeping the beam of light trained on my filthy fingers. Occasionally, she has to whip the camera under her jacket to shield it from an incoming wave. Ten minutes pass. The camera light dies. I describe to April the whereabouts of a fresh battery inside the Rathole and how to load it on the back of the camera. Eventually, we resume, now soaked to the skin and plastered in grease.

The propeller shows no interest in budging. A hammer would be nice, but it’s lying on the seabed somewhere between Hawaii and Tarawa. The only stout object to hand is the breadboard. A few seconds of heavy pounding and the shaft finally gives, dislodging a vital nut that skitters off the sacrificial brass peg and disappears into the oily muck.

“*Fuuucckk!*”

April has held out as long as she can. She turns white, hands me the camera, and makes a lunge for the side. A sweeping arc of vomit follows, splattering into the slick, adding curry to the oleaginous concoction. Remembering our promise to Kenny to film everything, I keep the camera running, capturing what is by now a well-rehearsed performance of feeding the fishes.

“I’m sorry,” April gasps between retches. “So sorry.”

Stomach once more empty, she sinks back to the passenger seat.

“April,” I say, cringing. “I have one last request, I’m afraid. Stupidly, I had the microphone turned off. Do you think you could do that last bit again? Just go through the motions so Kenny has some audio to work with. The whole sequence will be useless otherwise.”

As always, it’s the shit-hitting-the-fan episodes that make for the most engaging footage, one of the more perverse realities of documentary filmmaking.

April smiles thinly. “Sure.”

“Just for a few seconds. Thanks, you’re a real sport.”

She leans obligingly over the side and pretends to dry retch. The sound is pitiful. She even groans for effect.

“Great performance!” I say once she’s back inside. “Especially the groaning. Very convincing.”

“Actually,” she whispers, “I didn’t have to act. There can’t be that many people who can barf

on demand. I must have a special talent, huh?"

I pass her the camera so I can finish putting the unit back together, hammering the collar in place with the breadboard and securing the crank arms with a hex key. Changeover complete, I slide the replacement unit down through the stainless box, guiding the propeller by hand.

We've been dead in the water for nearly two and a half hours, taking us five miles closer to the Barrier Reef. It's time to get going.

I look at April. She's shivering and horribly seasick. Again.

"Okay, get thee to bed woman."

"Let me help clean up."

"No, get your arse in the Rathole."

"I guess that's a wrap, then," she mutters, crawling into the sleeping bag.