

Part III

"The Story Of Seahorse Sam"

Dialogue

The charge of the Unwitnessed Observer

In a dream, the Unwitnessed Observer came to Seahorse Sam:

Unwitnessed Observer: *Where have you been?*

Seahorse Sam: *Turning over stones!*

Unwitnessed Observer: *What did you find?*

Seahorse Sam: *Distractions!*

Unwitnessed Observer: *What is not distraction?*

Seahorse Sam: *Truth!*

Unwitnessed Observer: *What is Truth?*

Seahorse Sam: *Truth is that which is revealed to me when, humbly, I beseech to be guided ...*

Unwitnessed Observer: *Here then is your charge bon aventurier!*

*Of means fair and foul permitted:
anthropo-allegory, pinch of pillory,
stranded psyche-skeins unknitted;
revitalise discontented history!
Draw My abject charges carried
undulating atop crested waves of wonder,
each curiosity married -
contiguous mystery-matters to ponder.
Now! The tender awakenings,
private confidences of the seeker finding,
swelling towards their homecoming;
recreated, perfect, paradise reminding -
known only (for some turned away)
to every treasurer of the Supreme Promise.
For Love asked only Her own sway.
Objurgate this existential edifice!*

In My time, not yours, shall it be done!

*Sam awoke, exclaiming rhetorically in his empty chamber,
Whereas the beautiful and popular (neither of which am I)
Princess Diana crowned herself 'Queen Of Your Hearts'
By strange visitation's lot am I 'Beckoner To Your Minds'*

Seahorse Sam: *Have you a 'Mind'? Have you a 'Heart'?*

You, Dear Reader! *These are not for the taking!*

A word to the wise to those who'd hear:

resistance only seems necessary (ask the birds and the bees)



"Port Of Call"
Barriera Wharf, Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta

Chapter 11

"Shipwreck and soliloquy"

A confident and optimistic start

Seahorse Sam joined the stream of life as each seasoned moped (rusty and seized up - but for mandatory daily exercise) enters Calcutta's major intersections amidst the rapids of its morning rush hour; i.e., blindly and quickly; rooted juxtaposed in its own tributary; trusting (by custom) the torrent of vehicles dredging every senior thoroughfare (one juncture presenting as sore a test of the obliging predisposition of destiny as another): all told - one might say - enthusiastically, carelessly and optimistically. That same first dawn (of all of Sam's hitherto unravelled days) - the understated daybreak sun baked the patchwork of the city's dusty thoroughfares whilst balmy breezes whisked up the luminescent, unhelmeted manes of blithe and gay motorised charioteers and their pillions. Natural and easy friendships (untarnished by familiarity and any hardness of feeling) noiselessly expressed themselves between each driver and every passenger - unrestrained smiles overlying privately hopeful hearts. Oriental scents canoodled their unsolicited and intimate way into this paradise's newest, still green and fledgling nostrils. Seahorse Sam had hit the ground running in a veritable and heady Indian Eden. Like any other seahorse, Sam was excited by this novelty, and aroused to the sublimeness of very life itself by all his hearty companions.

Early ominousness and the most forlorn of sentiments

He found himself on arrival at his first port of call (just as his attention had begun to dissolve in a precipitous fatigue) being attended upon by a small number of peculiarly interested parties. Having descended into the colder shadows of a concrete jetty running alongside a decrepit three or four storey structure to the left (now obliterating the falling evening sun), and a shabby seagoing merchant vessel to his right (beautifully salty to his rampant nostrils), Sam was directed suddenly (by force of strange compliance) into a self-effacing and rather unlit warehouse-like hive of curious industry. Multitudes of grown seahorses conducted themselves rhythmically in strange but focussed and orchestrated patterns of movement. Not an intelligible word was spoken. A determined administrator loomed largely, seeing to it that Sam had not forgotten to be hungry. One ran for soapy water hither whilst another fetched a drying towel thither. A serious-looking, lab-coated specimen ruffled a sheaf of papers flapping from a clipboard as if attempting to secure the next urgent instruction from the manual of days. A disturbing aura emanated from this particular individual, who seemed to be inspecting Sam from top to toe - and inside out - as if clattering around in a toolbox for the right spanner to wrench an obstinate nut. Although Sam didn't feel unco-operative, he certainly felt trepidation - an uneasy queasiness about how things were turning out. Where was the big city? What kind of underworld was this? In one darkly unpredictable and unattended minute, Sam found himself trapped and contained. Discerning the fibres of a strange resistance within him becoming taut - urging him to escape, and to go back to his friends - he knew the compunction was foolish: he would only die on the dusty streets. Strangely powerless to explain, to hide or to move, the voiceless feeling was an oppressive dimness cast over the sunny conviviality and social glee he had known on the busy thoroughfares. He began to imagine them in visions by way of comfort till he might return. There was no answer for it: he could only bide his time - and that awful suspense was the loneliest and most forlorn of sentiments.

Creepy Clipboard Clive

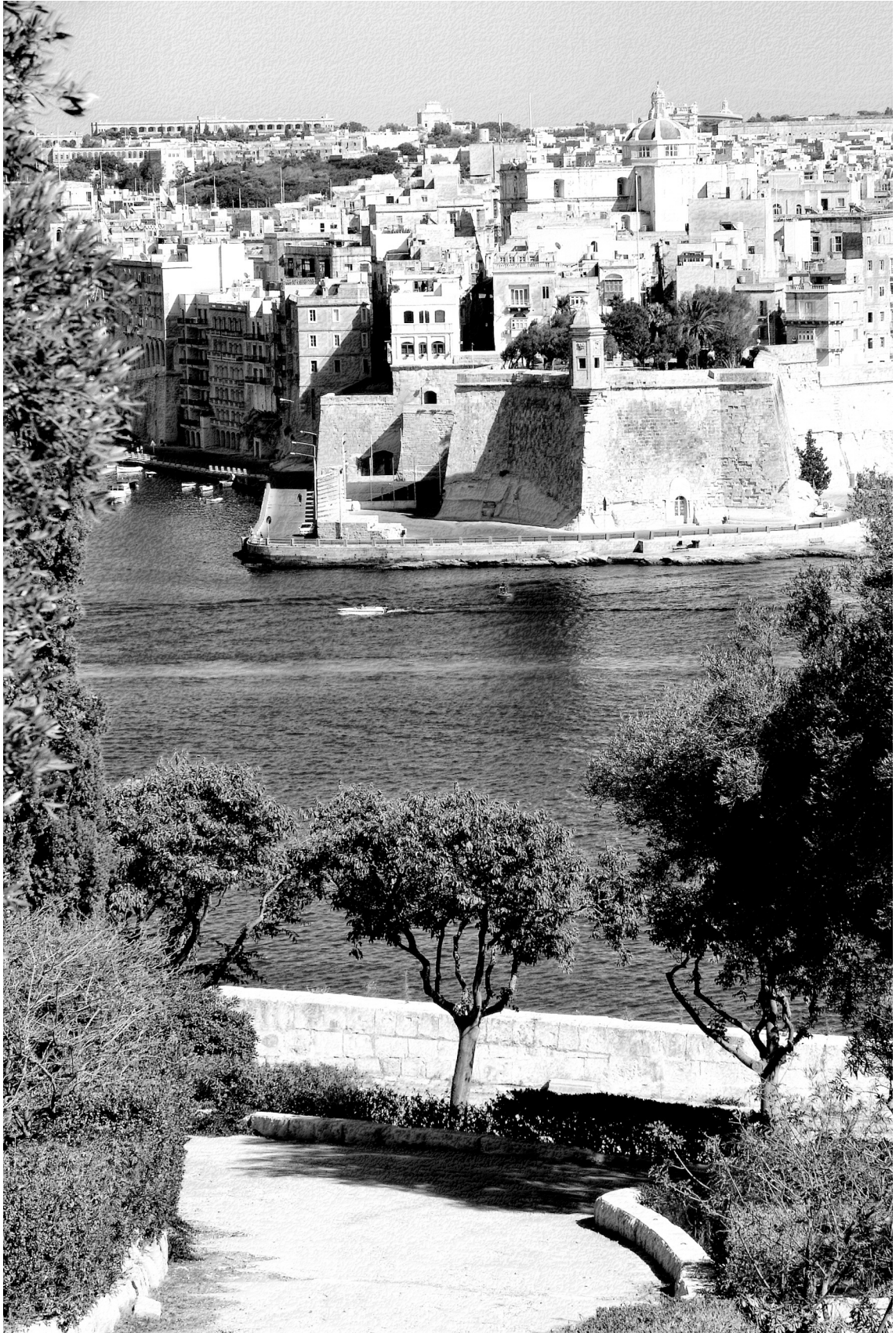
Was it all in Sam's imagination, or was the creepy superintendent - the one distinguished by the flapping clipboard - as often as not to be seen stooping sweetly before all manner of seahorses in just about precisely the proportion that their attributes varied from Sam's own? The slimy administrator leaned, slanty-headed in smiling co-operation with infant seahorses younger than Sam and, without prudence, seemed to court the admiring affections of junior and adolescent seahorses of the opposite sex. Tall, willowy and snooty over adults of his own social stature, he dominated by unproclaimed eclipse of joyfulness every sorry yardage he occupied. Most of all, he scuttled as smoothly deferent and as gallant as could ever be towards those fearsome shadowy figures and their consorts whose presence in the frantic hive was only ever discerned by their silhouettes and their imperatives. Rumoured to have been renamed Clive by kind volunteers following his arrival on the jetty many moons since as an incommunicative and inexplicably tatty fugitive from a distant land, secretly he had done away with his benefactors. Nobody addressed Clive by his name - nor ever steeled themselves to interrogate him on any delicate topic. And it seemed that every matter was a sensitive matter; at least, in so far as Clipboard Clive and Sam shared anything at all in common.

Flotsam and derelict of industry

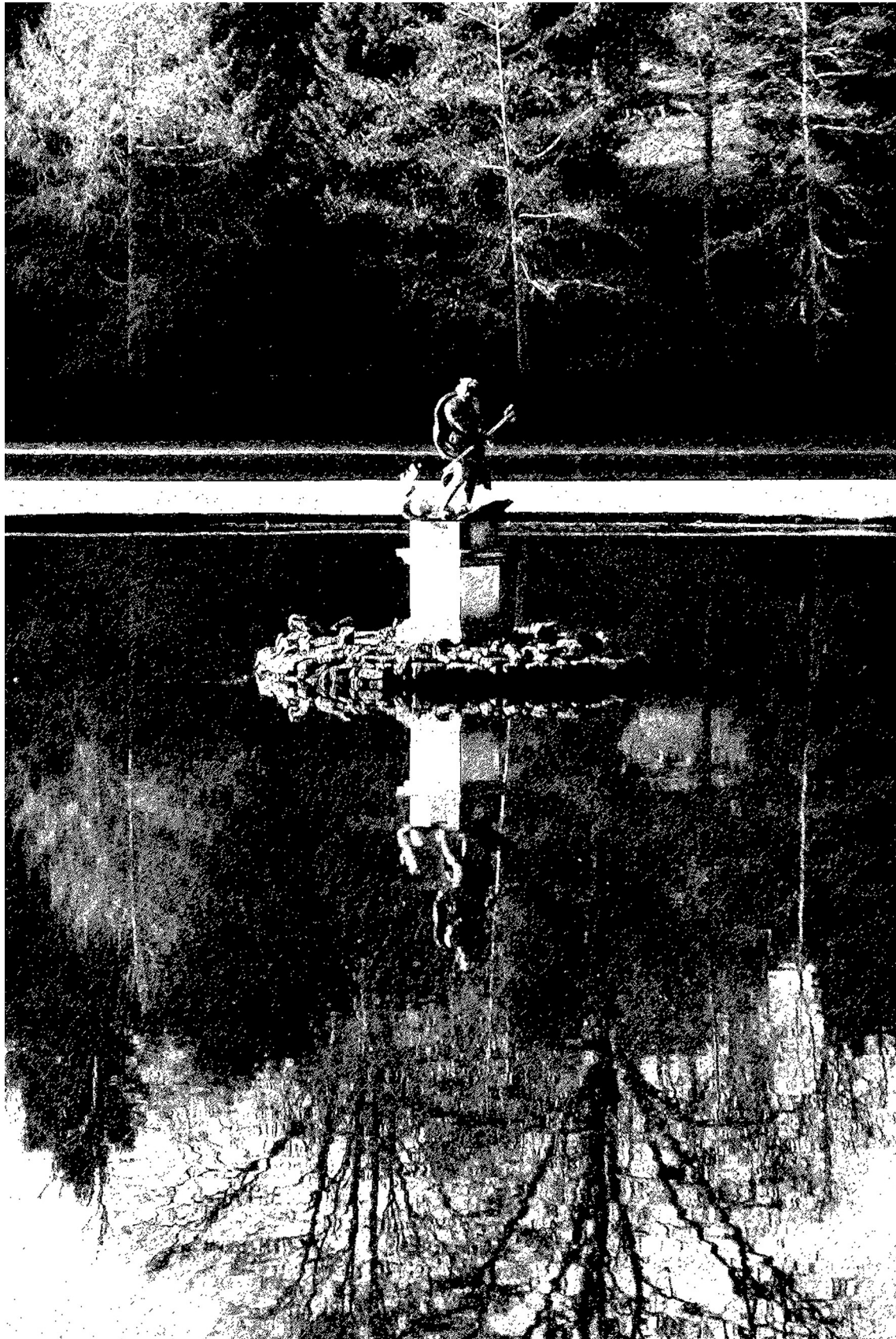
Salad days whispered clemency and gentle endorsement to Sam as had paradise her lovely biddable self during their first urban encounter. Over the ensuing months and years, Sam settled into the dockside environment as some kind of juvenile stomping ground - and he forged it as a happy one. He grew to know the environment boundaried by the extremities of this particular harbour location well: its nooks and its crannies; its secret recesses where older seahorses and appointed officials never ventured, and its hidden and dangerous backwaters where corridors and passing points for vessels and pedestrians alike got washed constantly in the detritus of manufacturing technology - litter - borne atop the foamy crests of tidal inundations. All this flotsam and derelict of seahorse industry was offensive to Sam; unbeautiful, and ever appealing for its own removal and destruction. It pleaded innocence in its impact - as unthinking refuse rather than calculated contamination; only barely toxic nuisance - all the same, it was unwanted in Sam's playground and he removed it with elementary willingness and effort. Notwithstanding his chagrin, the world was a simple and welcoming place for easily satisfied adventurers like Sam.

Persecution

One temperate afternoon, Sam was wading sun-bound along a rivulet arched on both banks by the most exotic and proud of lofty flora; his pockets bulging with fine stones for the keeping. In his embrace grew steadily a pile of consumer jetsam ready for incineration back at the boiler room behind the warehouse. Nobody knew that Sam dispensed of pollution in this way - for he chose his moments for tipping the miserable refuse carefully, and the evidence was always destroyed. Clipboard Clive appeared suddenly - armed with a strange photographic device. Wearing an immensely satisfied expression, the interloper announced his proud intention to declare Sam's crimes to the seahorse community. Since the camera never lies, Sam would be charged with mischievously emptying manufacturing refuse into local waters. The creep disappeared as quickly as he had come, and Sam worked his baffled way back to private quarters. So many light years from being able to fathom Clive's motives, intentions or influence - Sam sensed that something dire was about to happen. Even those seahorses whom he might have depended upon most for solidarity sided with Clive because of his seniority. Sam was beckoned, admonished and interned. Rather out of character, he squirmed, and brooded darkly in his desolation.



"Dockside Environment"
Senglea (Civitas Invicta) and Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta



"Homage To Neptune"
Studley Royal, North Yorkshire

A bid for freedom

By nightfall, Sam had hatched a dream. Longingly he fantasised about his freedom. But what was his freedom? Anything but *this*! Anything characterised by light and wind and sun and air and waves and sea and movement and running and leaping and tearing down and building up. What had he to lose? All *this*? Then surely he had *everything* to gain. Pinching himself to remain awake, he waited until half way through the night by which time, he reasoned, the risk of waking an overseer or disturbing anyone who might raise an alarm would be at a minimum. Taking nothing with him (except the spectacles he commonly wore – and without which he wouldn't have got far at all free of faltering), but realising he must have sustenance for a day or two, he escaped via the kitchen and its small skylight which was never closed or locked. Scaling down the hard tiled roof, and over the flat extension of the boiler house he knew affectionately from another perspective, a drain pipe broke the last vertical rush away from Sam's erstwhile prison. Smiling to himself wordlessly through his fear and his adrenalin, he skipped madly along the jetty past the briny ship and down towards the steps that led to the rivulet where Clive had tripped him up. Down another tributary he knew there was an old timber wreck which floated and beached on each modest tide. As far as Sam was concerned, it was an utterly seaworthy craft. Several frustrating minutes subtracted from Sam's glee as he worked to loosen the knots of the sodden rope that anchored the old ship to a tree. Uttering a Roman homage to Neptune as the last damp fibres yielded to his testy tugs, he pushed and heaved at its stern until it moved off the stony bank upon which it had lain asleep in the night – redundant of all purpose for years as far as Sam knew. He clambered over the aftmost rail, and stood quietly in the night – silent but for the barely audible drift of an opportunely conspiratorial tide as it retreated to the ocean taking Sam and his battered but obedient vessel away to providence.

Unconstrained but for weather

Embarked buoyant and unconstrained (but for weather) upon this sudden nautical mission, the only future beckoning him cooed persistently – as if a loyal, dedicated lover, ever reinventing herself, invariably manifest as some invitation to an immediate and fascinating pleasure. Sam coursed like Odysseus²³⁸ (only rather less royally) through an omnibus of fabulous maritime adventures. A buccaneering roustabout, he navigated himself and his remarkably constant boat from one flabbergasted China Shop to another. Every breeze quickening over the seas fomented a nimble tack and an impetuous bearing from the young mariner. Myopic, cartographically incautious and defying unsounded fathoms – somehow (as if underwritten by a mystical guarantor), Sam survived the objections of fate and (almost) silent protests of his own personal destiny. Seafaring recklessness cast him to many shores – foreign in location; exotic in local abundance, and eerily remote in culture. Slowly and without discerning (far less appreciating) the ruinous trajectory of his inner resilience, Sam descended steadily from the bliss and optimism of snatched liberation through the ignorance and shadows of many a hollow triumph. In several turbulent storms Sam established for himself an affable seahorse haven – always (going by the bunting) ready to greet him and afford him succour – but none could or would ever retain his restless and slippery anchor.

²³⁸ Odysseus was renowned amongst the Ancient Greeks for his sharpness (of "mind"), powers of persuasion, diplomatic adeptness, warrior-guile and ingenious military plots (including the mythical wooden horse devised for the sacking of Troy). As we all know, there is always more than one account of history. Odysseus's reputed self-discipline was interspersed with instances of wrath, and he was less revered amongst the Romans who – by dint of conquest – became entitled to render fresh accounts of Mediterranean history (and who prided themselves on honour rather than cunning and sleight of hand).

A final escape and a curious detachment

Escaping to the open ocean after yet another frustrated encounter with a ruthlessly lascivious indigenous hostess, Sam found himself slumped in a corner of his bridge feeling peculiarly exhausted. Taking leave of keen navigation, he discovered himself with bursts and echoes of needles and pins - strangely absent from, and floating away from his usual robust self, as if a dying astronaut suddenly and unfortunately disconnected from the mothership and all its familiar crew. The world had fallen silent and dark as in an unpolluted night. The sense of aloneness that had descended upon him was fantastically intense. More than any and all of this, he had somehow - through the aggregate of all of his experience since escaping from the dismal warehouse on that maritime jetty - taken delivery without warning of the most curious new outlook in his wearied body and dispirited mind.

Self-reliance, mastery and vanity

Hope had gone. Sam had lost hope. There was none whatsoever left, and it promised no return. The hope he suddenly missed was the hope that he had relied upon by custom in all his past days to pull him through each and every (inevitably difficult) encounter with this pressing world and its challenging and belligerent occupants. It was the hope that drove and encouraged him as if a fluctuating but nevertheless inexhaustible battery of energy - and of pure luck - for all of his waking comings and goings. This usually subliminal supply got him through the successive trials of living - as if a precious metal that would always weigh heavier in the scales of fortune than the greatest imaginable cost of every ordeal of existence and its survival. At last it had deserted him. He could not rise from the floor. He had become helpless. All notion of power was vanity. He knew as a penny-dropped, plain and encyclopaedic fact that he could not save himself.

Shipwreck

Then ... the first, precipitate and colossal return to his senses. His trusty companion - the old but reliable timbered craft - had noisily, and with an enormous and reverberant crunch, splintered itself on a tide-worn but hefty array of steadfast and barely submersed rocks. These - seemingly with animate, cognate and unwavering intent - were plainly resolute in their determination to ground Sam's adventures permanently - but lacked harshness in their determination as if a drill instructor rendered voiceless by rash compassion stumbling on a war-struck, traumatised infant. Sam had never encountered such paradoxically gentle obduracy - unspeakable darkness, the toxicity of his emotional environment, the sheer and painful desolation of his lost mind - but all of these became suddenly and queerly suspended. Had there been some unseen agency behind this turn of events? Why had the disintegration of his ship occurred only moments after desertion of hope? Simply because he had abandoned watch in his exhaustion? What was the use of sweet reason for fathoming all of this - for he was possessed now of only the unassailable "truth" of his experience both in the material world - and in the restored life of his spirit.

The shocking discovery about Clipboard Clive

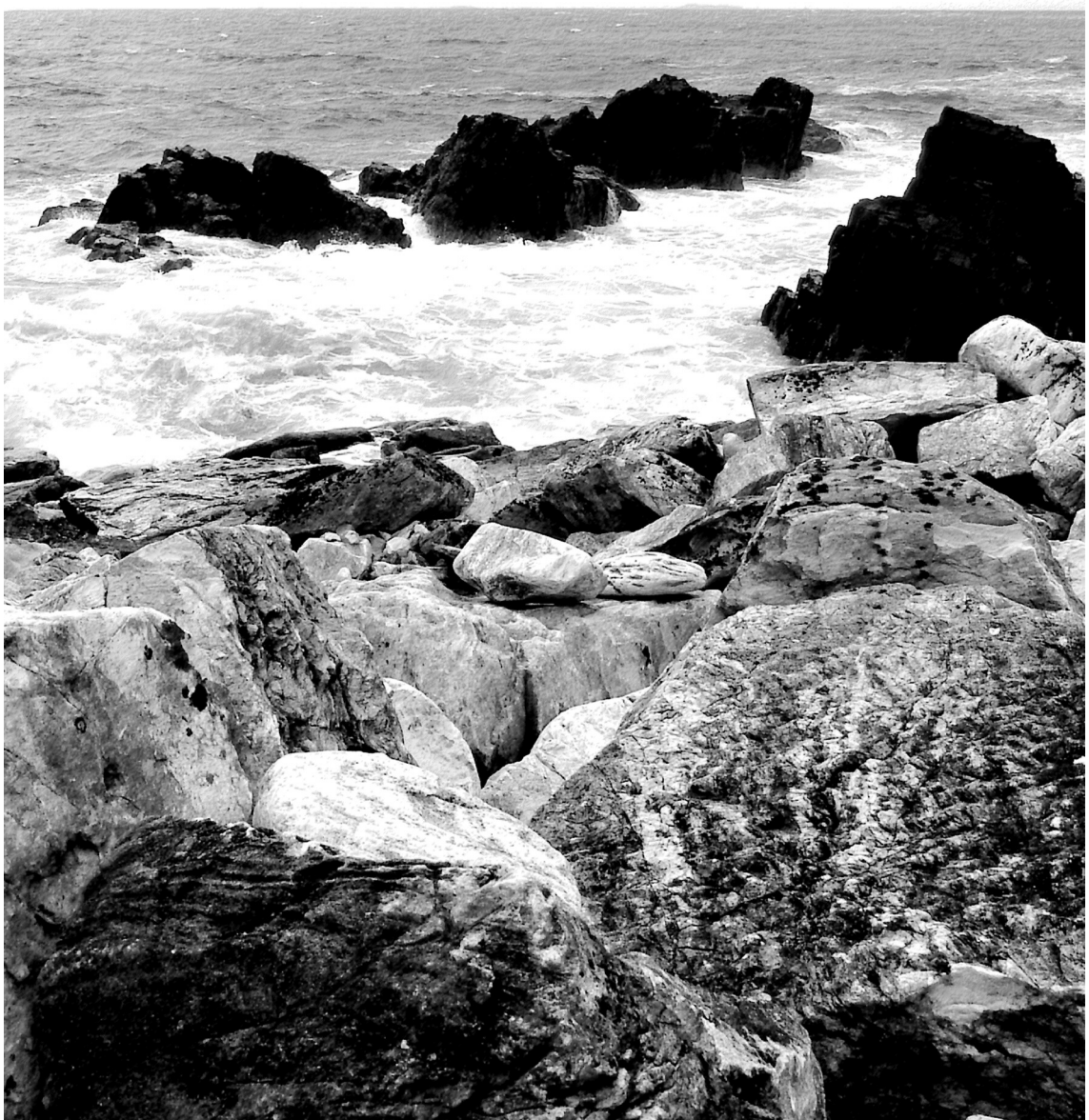
Rummaging about in the Captain's locker for bottled water from his prone position, Sam's digits lighted upon some old parchment which transpired on inspection to be a large envelope containing a poster. Sam drew it out and held it to the window. It read (with a mugshot):

WANTED FOR FOUL AND VILLAINOUS MURDER

Lord T. Dover alias "Clipboard Clive"

\$ REWARD for freemen or AMNESTY for felons

The musty, chilling pronouncement was dated less than a year prior to Clive's fabled deliverance from distress into the seahorse community.



"Steadfast And Barely Submersed Rocks"
Rubha na Carraig géire (The marble quarry), Iona, Scotland



"Foul And Villainous Murder" (but what really happened?)
National Museum of The Royal Navy, Portsmouth



"Captain's Locker"
Commander's cabin, HMS Warrior, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard



"Shipwreck"

The Gannel Estuary tidal wildlife haven, Newquay, Cornwall

Soliloquy

"Tomorrow's Easy World" including refrain

In tomorrow's easy world
I wished things all my own way
And as the shrunken years unfurled
And I forgot to pray
In my haste to make things right
I seized my dreams away
Till on my knees with no more fight
I learned there's just one day

In tomorrow's easy world, the perfect dame would do
A maid to smooth away my fears; a nurse to pull me through
Away to port in every storm; a storm in every port
An invoice thirty-nine years long for every refuge sought
A vain attempt to underpin the homeless child in me
At last I offered up my reckless, feckless ways to Thee
The anchor for the drifting raft, the signpost for the stray
The Lord of storms, The Lord of life, The Lord of just one day

In tomorrow's easy world
I wished things all my own way
And as the shrunken years unfurled
And I forgot to pray
In my haste to make things right
I seized my dreams away
Till on my knees with no more fight
I learned there's just one day

In tomorrow's easy world, as captain of a crew
With nought to fear, no guide to steer, no chart to misconstrue
With short supply, a certain eye, and paucity of thought
I drove my way through hearts and minds in every battle fought
The stout pursuit of each delight, the idle quest for bliss
At last I opened up my heart to all that was remiss
To Thee I yielded up the strain, the wrangle, the mêlée
The Lord of storms, The Lord of life, The Lord of just one day

In tomorrow's easy world
I wished things all my own way
And as the shrunken years unfurled
And I forgot to pray
In my haste to make things right
I seized my dreams away
Till on my knees with no more fight
I learned there's just one day

In tomorrow's easy world, companions grew more few
No captive's name to bear the blame, no scapegoat that I knew
I knocked on wood, despised the good, did little that I ought
Dissolved the day, and come what may, disowned what I'd been taught
A long crusade to serve myself, no praise where credit due
At last I learned the vital charge of daily thanking You
Provider to the modest heart, presenter of the way
The Lord of storms, The Lord of life, The Lord of just one day

In tomorrow's easy world
I wished things all my own way
And as the shrunken years unfurled
And I forgot to pray
In my haste to make things right
I seized my dreams away
Till on my knees with no more fight
I learned there's just one day