

693 45216 3



# AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

CHARLES WILLIAMS



**A master storyteller's  
most menacing sea adventure**

# And The Deep Blue Sea

by

Charles Williams

1971

# Contents

[Title Page](#)

[1](#)

[2](#)

[3](#)

[4](#)

[5](#)

[6](#)

[7](#)

[8](#)

[9](#)

[10](#)

[11](#)

[12](#)

[13](#)

[14](#)

At sunset the next day after the *Shoshone* went down, the wind dropped to a gentle breeze, and by midnight it was calm. Now that the sea no longer broke, the raft stopped capsizing and throwing him, and he slept for the first time in forty hours. He awoke at dawn, cramped, chilled through, shivering in his wet clothes in spite of the fact he was only a few degrees south of the Line. After the first gut-twisting impact of returning consciousness of where he was and what was coming, he was able to subdue the black animal and slam the door of the cage, wondering at the same time why it mattered. He had nothing to lose now. And he'd already panicked once, or he wouldn't be here. He could have done it the easy way.

He lay stretched out on the rubberized fabric of the raft's bottom, his head on its inflated rim, a big man with graying dark hair too long uncut, gray eyes, and a broad, flat-planed face burned dark by the sun and now salt-inflamed and covered to the cheekbones with a week's stubble of beard. His feet were bare, and he wore only the faded and sodden dungarees, a blue shirt, and a gold-cased Rolex watch which was waterproof and still running. He was alone on the raft, which wasn't much larger than he was and contained nothing else except a whiskey bottle with a little water in it. His name was Harry Goddard, he was forty-five years old, divorced, childless for the past five months, and until the last of his luck ran out two days ago he had been single-handing across the Pacific in the thirty-two-foot sloop *Shoshone* for reasons he wasn't sure of himself except that the horizon provided a sort of self-renewing objective if you no longer had any other.

He was overtaken by another attack of shivering and wished for the sun's warmth to begin, knowing that long before the day was over he'd be praying even more fervently for its torture to end. The raft lifted under him, mounting softly and in utter silence, poised for an instant, and began to fall away again down the back of another swell rolling across the wastes of the southern hemisphere. The square shape of the Jack Daniels bottle was under his left leg, its neck secured to the fabric eyelet of one of the oarlocks with the lanyard he had fashioned from a strip of cloth cut from his shirt tail. He lifted it and squinted at it against the sky. It still held nearly a half pint of water, and he was conscious of no torment yet from thirst. The only hell was the certainty that it was coming.

What happened at the end, just how did you die? Did you go mad and jump overboard? Drink seawater and kill yourself with nausea and empty retching? How long did it take? He didn't know, but there was no point in speculating about it now, and he might as well go ahead and sit up to look around. He was sufficiently awake and in command of himself to accept what he would see. Pretending there was still some chance, as long as he hadn't looked, that there could be a ship on the horizon was something to hang onto, but you couldn't keep it alive all day.

He raised up, his hands braced against the inflated rim of the doughnut, and as it

rose to the crest of another swell he turned, searching the rim of his world where the sea met the sky. There was only emptiness. Well, he thought, you wanted solitude; you've got it. You're up to your ass in it.

As deadly as it was, there was no escaping the beauty of it. In the vast hush of early morning, the sea was smooth as glass except for the heave and surge of the long swell running up from the south. It was full daylight now, the eastern sky a pale wash of rose becoming barred with gold, and the towering masses of cloud above him were touched with flame. A school of flying fish lanced out of the sea, scattering fanwise, leaving their takeoff trails etched for a fleeting instant across the mirror of its surface. But above all, and pervading everything, was the silence; it was the silence of the world's dawn, before the beginnings of life. Under sail there were always sounds, the rushing of water past the hull, breaking seas, the flutter at the luff of a sail, spattering of spray, the creak of timbers, and the singing of wind in the rigging, and even becalmed there was the slatting of sails and the rolling and banging of gear that went on forever, but here there was nothing, no sound at all. The raft was an air bubble cushioned on a sea of oil that pushed it up, slid under it without friction or effort, and went on in its silent march toward infinity.

More flying fish shot out of a swell just ahead of him like an explosion of silvery projectiles, pursued by some larger fish below the surface, and he was suddenly reminded of hunger, remembering other dawns when he had found two or three of them on deck where they'd flown into the sails during the night to wind up unconscious in the scupper and then, cleaned and breaded, into the frying pan for breakfast. He thought of how they tasted, with crisp bacon and a boiled potato, as he sat in the cockpit with the plate on his knees and a mug of hot coffee beside him, watching the sun come up. And then the first cigarette of the day— For Christ's sake, he thought, knock it off.

He felt a moment's light-headedness with the withdrawal pangs of a cigarette addict nearly three days without a smoke. You could get drunk, he thought, on simple, uncontaminated air. He glanced at the bottle again, but resisted the urge to take a swallow, wondering at the same time why this insistence on cutting the puppy's tail off an inch at a time. If he had anything to write with, he reflected, he could put a note in it when it was empty. What final bit of wisdom for the ages, what capsuled summation? A single Anglo-Saxon word? No, that was grandstanding. He could do better. *Greetings from Harry Goddard, who didn't have sense enough to drown.*

Not that it was important any more, but he would never even know what he'd hit that had sent the *Shoshone* to the bottom. It couldn't have been a whale. Yachts had been damaged by whales, but they usually made their presence known; they didn't like it any better than the yachtsmen who'd hit them. After the first crashing impact there'd been nothing, no swirl of flukes or sound of blowing, or any disturbance on the surface of the sea. And a reef was out of the question; there would have been white water on it, and there wasn't one within a thousand miles, anyway. A derelict would have had something showing above the surface. He couldn't swear, of course, that there hadn't been, since it was a dark night and he'd been staring into the binnacle except for an occasional glance around the horizon for lights, but it was still improbable. The most likely suspect was a half-submerged log, some forest giant washed down one of the great tropical rivers and carried across the Pacific on its currents or perhaps lost from

the deck cargo of a freighter during a storm.

He'd been fighting the frustrating calms and fluky airs along the Equator for nearly a week when it happened. Around noon he'd picked up a gentle breeze out of the south and had ghosted along under the main and big genoa, momentarily expecting it to die out or go swinging around the compass, but it had held, backing into the southeast and freshening slightly by the hour. At sunset the *Shoshone* was heeled down smartly and reeling off the miles on a broad reach, her best point of sailing, with the wind still freshening and the sea beginning to kick up, and by ten p.m. her starboard rail was awash and she was logging her maximum hull speed through the darkness. If it picked up any more he'd have to shorten sail. He was listening carefully to the moaning sound of the wind in the rigging and debating whether he ought to get the genoa off her when she hit.

The sea was almost abeam. One had just rolled under her, and the *Shoshone* was dropping into the trough behind it so that in addition to nearly seven knots forward speed she came down on whatever it was with enough force to break the back of a lesser boat. Goddard shot forward in the cockpit to slam into the end of the deckhouse beside the companion hatch, momentarily stunned, while shrouds and backstay parted like violin strings. The mast went overboard with its two big sails in a welter of stainless steel wire and Dacron, and by the time he could push himself groggily to his feet he could hear it banging against the hull. He groped inside the hatch for the flashlight, but in his haste he knocked it out of its clips on the bulkhead and it fell to the cabin sole. The *Shoshone* was rolling violently now, dead in the water, and there was another crash as the mast swung into her side.

He plunged down the ladder, lost his balance, and was thrown to his hands and knees against the chart table. The flashlight rolled into him. He grabbed at it, but it went clattering away in the darkness. He tried to calm himself; he was losing his head in a situation where wasted minutes could mean disaster. He pushed himself to his feet, switched on the cabin light, and scooped up the flashlight. It was broken. But there was another in one of the drawers of the chart table. He grabbed it out and ran on deck.

He'd already swung the beam of light in a wide arc across the darkness and the piled and breaking sea astern, searching futilely for what he'd hit, before the idiocy of it finally got his attention. What was he after—a license number, witnesses? He shot the light into the churning mess along the starboard side. The mast and the two sails were still fast to the hull by the forestay, the starboard shrouds, and tangle of halyards and sheets, so he wasn't in any danger of losing them, but the sails were full of water and would have to be lowered before he could even start to get the spars back aboard. They were still banging against the hull with every roll, but the mast itself was hollow and the boom too light to do any immediate damage to the planking. It would have to wait. He turned and plunged down the ladder again, and even as his eyes came below the level of the hatch he felt the icy tingle of gooseflesh between his shoulder blades. A tiny rivulet of water had rolled out of the bilge and was spreading across the cabin sole that had been dry less than a minute ago.

At the forward end of the cabin, beyond the foot of the mast, was the narrow passage into the forepeak, flanked on one side by the enclosed head and on the other by a locker. He shot through it, switched on the light, and looked, expecting to see the

whole bow caved in. There was no visible evidence of damage. But everything he could see was above the waterline. The cabin sole extended into this small triangular space in the bows, and on both sides were benches with lockers beneath, the whole area piled with sailbags, spare rope, extra water cans, unopened cases of food, a sea anchor, and a bundled pneumatic raft. Somewhere under all this, the *Shoshone* was badly holed below the waterline.

He cleared the compartment by the simple expedient of hurling everything behind him into the cabin, banging water cans, sailbags, and cases of canned goods that burst open and scattered when they hit. As he threw the last of it out of the way, he looked behind him and saw there was now at least an inch of water sweeping back and forth across the cabin sole through this confusion of gear.

In the center of the compartment there was a two-by-two-foot hatch in the floorboards. He grasped the recessed ring-bolt and yanked it out. Water rolled up through the opening and went running aft—ominously clear water, fresh from the sea. A small river of it was flowing in somewhere just forward of him. With the light overhead he could see the frames and planking directly below the hatch. They were unbroken. He grabbed the flashlight and lay flat, training the beam forward under the edge of the hatch. Still no damage. But he couldn't see far enough; the angle was too sharp, unless he put the flashlight in the water.

He was assailed by a savage compulsion to hurry, and realized he had been cursing ceaselessly and monotonously under his breath. He seemed to be moving forever through a nightmare in slow motion. What the hell difference did it make whether he could see the damage from here or not? He knew it was there, and seeing it wasn't going to do any good until he could get at it to try to repair it. He sprang up and attacked the lockers.

The chain locker first. It was at the apex of the triangle, right in the bow. The two anchors with their lengths of chain went flying back to land on the cabin sole, and then as he grabbed out the big coil of anchor warp, he saw it—or rather, he saw the upper part of it. Two frames on the starboard side were broken and pushed inward, and water poured in through a shattered plank. But the real damage was still below the bottom of the locker.

The next contained tools. He threw it open, grabbed out the small handax, and began smashing at the side of the locker. He had to tear it out of the way before he could get at the floor beneath it. It was marine plywood, fastened with bronze screws, and there was little room to swing the ax. Before he had half of it hacked away, he looked down and saw with horror that he was already standing in several inches of water. He'd never get to it in time, not from here. He had to shove something in the hole from outside to slow the flood enough to hold it with the bilge pump, at least until daybreak. Grabbing up the flashlight, he ran back through the cabin, picking up one of the sailbags on the fly, and hurried on deck.

The *Shoshone* still lay in the trough, rolling heavily, but there was already a different feel to her, a reluctance to come back each time with the inertia of the water inside her. He threw the light into the surging mess of spars and cordage and Dacron along the starboard side and knew it would be suicide to go under it or between it and the hull. The plunging hull itself was dangerous enough without the broken mast battering into it. There was no time to fool with turnbuckles and shackles, working

one-handed on a lurching deck while he tried to hold a light. He ran below again for the handax. The steel forestay was tough, and the ax only buried it in the wood, so it took a half dozen swings before he severed it. With nothing holding it forward of the shrouds, he was able to haul the whole mess aft along the hull and secure it back out of the way. The sailbag he'd brought up held a storm jib. He pulled it out of the bag and went over the side with it.

The dark mass of the bow heaved up and plunged down on him. He pushed clear, waiting, and when it steadied for a moment, came in against it. He groped, felt the jagged ends of broken planking and the water pouring through, and tried to stuff the jib into it. There was no clearly defined hole, only a great area of split and shattered planks and pushed-in frames, nowhere enough of an opening to get the cloth in far enough to hold. The *Shoshone* lurched to starboard and came down on him with stunning force, pushing him under the surface. He kicked backward and got clear, and when she steadied again the sail was gone. He threshed around with his hands, groping for it; they encountered nothing. The *Shoshone* rolled down again and hung there, wallowing sluggishly. He grabbed the rail and climbed back aboard. Just as he reached the companion hatch the cabin lights went out. Water had covered the batteries. There was no longer any hope. She was filling too fast for anything to save her.

The next half hour was never very clear in his mind. He had no precise recollection of how he had got the raft out of the cabin, found the pump, and inflated it—nor even why he had done it, except that the survival instinct was apparently basic and not to be denied by trifles like logic and realistic appraisals of the situation. It wasn't even supposed to be a life raft; he had it aboard only for skin-diving forays along the reefs of the South Pacific which he would never reach now. There were no oars, no sail, and no food or water, but somewhere in the confusion he had grabbed up the Jack Daniels bottle he kept in the cockpit so he wouldn't have to go below for water during long spells at the tiller. Each time the doughnut capsized and threw him he righted it and dragged himself back aboard, still clutching the neck of the bottle. After an eternity of this it was dawn, and he secured it to the oarlock tab with the lanyard cut from his shirt tail. At the same time he scooped from his pocket the sodden pulp which was all that remained of a pack of cigarettes and threw it overboard, thinking of the old gags about fighter pilots and lung cancer.

The sun rose. The glare began, eye-searing and brutal, broken only intermittently by the tilting planes of the swell. His skin itched and chafed inside his salt-saturated clothing, and as his face and arms began to dry they felt as though they were encased in a crust that would shatter when he moved. The only relief, which was temporary and merely an illusion, was to plunge overboard and wash it away with water that would leave its own accumulation. The swell was smaller now than it had been last night, and if it died out completely the sea would become the polished metal sheet of a reflector oven.

He searched the horizon again, and lay back, an arm across his closed eyes to shield them from the glare. He thought of mountain streams he had fished where the water was cold enough to make his teeth hurt when he drank it, and after a while he found himself remembering beer—beer in foaming steins and cold bottles beaded with moisture. Tüborg and Dos Equis and Budweiser and Lowenbrau, the gaseous and ecstatic sighs of punched cans, beer in waterfront dives and yacht club bars, in

sidewalk cafes in Paris and the parlors of Texas whorehouses and the cockpits of sports fishermen off Cape San Lucas and Bimini.

There was the place in Tampico a long time ago, so cool and dim after the incandescent whiteness of the street, where draft beer was served in frosted earthen steins and there were saucers of olives on the polished mahogany bar with sliced limes to squeeze over them. That was on the other *Shoshone*, the first one, when he'd run away from home and shipped as ordinary seaman, and afterward he'd gone out to La Union, where the girls sat beside the doorways of their cribs, and he'd got into a fight with the second mate of a Sinclair tanker over something he couldn't even remember now, and the second mate had beaten hell out of him. He was only nineteen then and still filling out, but too cocky, and he probably deserved to have his ass kicked.

It was a long way from the fo'c'sle of an old Hog Islander to skippering your own Cal 40 in the Acapulco race, but it had been a long time, too, and where did it go, that feeling of being nineteen, or twenty-three, or even thirty-six? You not only didn't know what had become of it, you weren't even sure what it was any more and couldn't remember what it had been when you'd had it. Juice? Drive? Confidence? No, it wasn't as simple as that; as close as you could come to it was caring. Stoically accepting the fact that within a few days he was going to die was no longer courage; it was merely apathy. The only real regret was that he'd suckered himself into such a hell of a sad way of doing it. He smiled now at the transparency of christening the sloop *Shoshone*. Did he think the nineteen-year-old Harry Goddard was still out here somewhere, to be searched for and reclaimed?

The sun reached the meridian. Reflected from the oily surface of the sea, it burned its way even through closed eyelids and felt like flame against his skin. Real thirst began, a foretaste of the agony to come, and he took a swallow of the water, rolling it around his mouth for long seconds before he let it trickle down his throat. A shark appeared from somewhere and circled the raft three or four times as though intrigued by the strange yellow bubble. Goddard watched its dorsal slicing the surface and, more to break the eerie silence than anything else, said to it, 'Shove off, you silly bastard. That's a low-budget routine.' The shark came closer on its next pass, and he took out his knife and opened it, ready to stab if it decided to roll up and take an experimental bite out of the fabric. The shark lost interest and went away. Around two p.m. a light breeze sprang up, ruffling and darkening the surface of the sea and lessening the intensity of its glare. It continued until late afternoon, making the heat at least endurable, and died out only with the vast chromatic explosion of sunset. He watched the colors fade in the sudden velvet night of the tropics and wondered how many more he would see. Two? Four? After a while he slept.

When he awoke, shivering again, he saw from the positions of the constellations overhead that it was after midnight. The sea was still slick and almost flat now, and beyond his feet propped on the rim of the raft a shimmering path of light stretched away toward a waning moon hung low in the eastern sky. He sat up to stretch his cramped muscles, and when he turned he saw the ship, not more than a mile away.

His first thought was that he must be dreaming. He rubbed both hands across his face, feeling the beard stab his salt-ravaged face, and looked again. It was real. But there was something wrong. When he realized what it was he had to choke down the cry pushing up into his throat. He could see only a stern light. It was going away from

him. It had already passed, only minutes ago, while he slept.

No! How could it? He looked around at the placid unruffled sea. It would have passed within a few hundred yards, and the bow wave would have tossed the raft end over end like a bit of flotsam. There wasn't even a trace of wake anywhere. He was almost directly astern of the ship, but it hadn't gone by him. The only answer was that it was lying dead in the water. It had stopped for something, and had swung around as it lost steerage-way. Unless, he thought, his mind was already playing him tricks and there wasn't any ship there at all.