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propeller. I put the engine in gear to stop its rotation and reduce the drag. The time was getting on for noon and the wind was rising. So were the waves, which by now were three or four feet in height. We went scorching out into the main lake. About the middle of the passage, a gust of wind laid the schooner over on her side till water foamed along the deck. A whitecap burst under the windward side of the hull. Suddenly she was laboring, pressed down by the wind and thumped by the rising sea. Time to shorten sail. I scrambled up on the cabin roof and lowered the mainsail. At once her motion eased as the wind caught the jib and blew the boat around till she headed straight downwind, frothing along under her smallest sail. On the heaving deck I tied the mainsail down, then scuttled forward, out on the projecting bowsprit, and hauled down the jib. The schooner stopped, came broadside to the waves, and rolled heavily as I clung to the deck and lashed down the sail. I hoisted the foresail alone, and she headed downwind again. I went back to the cockpit and started the engine. Hironnelle is unlikely ever to capsize, with a ton of lead along her keel, but she has a large open cockpit, where the helmsman sits; if that should fill up with water, she could founder. Objectively speaking, I'm certain that was never likely • but it is one thing to be objective in a warm, still study, another thing to cope with short rough seas about six feet in height by now, breaking occasionally on the afterdeck. Any sailor can be brave in the yacht club bar. As I crept to windward under foresail and engine in steep seas which lifted the stem and drove the bow into green water, I was shaking with fear. I took off my sunglasses, streaked and clouded with salt spray, and squinted up to the west, where the wind was coming from. Down toward the schooner marched the curling caps of the seas, shining like wrinkled foil, rank upon relentless rank. I put my sunglasses back on. There are things you'd rather not see too clearly. Let me make it through this, I muttered, watching our agonizingly slow progress towards the Derby Point lighthouse at the entrance to Barra Strait, and I will sell the boat and never go outside HomeEnergy ?? FURNACE OIL ?? STOVE OIL ?? LUBE OIL ?? KEROSENE ?? AUTOMATIC DELIVERY ?? BUDGET PLANS - SERVICE PLANS Serving SYDNEY, GLACE BAY, NORTH SYDNEY, NEW WATERFORD and Surrounding Areas 24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICES LeBlanc Fuels.Glace Bay..849-4626 Mercer Fuels....Sydney 539-7580 Cogan FuelsNorth Sydney.794-2010 my own little harbour again. It's perfectly possible, I realized, to do something egregiously wrong through inexperience, panic, or misjudgment • to be thrown overboard, say, while the ship plunges on • and to be drowned just as efficiently in sight of Derby Point as in the greybeard seas of the Southern Ocean. I'm doing this for fun, I thought incredulously, and I cursed myself for an addicted fool. I remembered the time and money I had lavished on Hironnelle, and I recalled Cyril Connolly's dictum that "the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece, and that no other task is of any consequence." Where, I asked myself bitterly, was my masterpiece? Had I not wasted on this wretched obsession with sailing the hours which might have gone



into that brilliant, singing, passionate book? At least, I thought, let me vow not to he about this. I wiU admit to anyone, any time, that I would gladly be anywhere else on earth at this moment, that I do not feel any easy confidence in my ship nor in my own abiUties. It is so unbeUevably easy to make port after such an experience and to shmg and say, "Oh yeah, blowin' pretty fresh out there," as though there were nothing to it. It is easy actually to forget what it was like, what you felt, and to build in your mind a different set of memories. After all, you did make it uneventfully, didn't you? Hirondelle did handle it admir? ably, didn't she? You are one heU of a crasty old salt, aren't you? No, I'm not. But I watched a big ketch straggle up past Pipers Cove and sUde into the strait, and a few minutes later I came into the shelter of the land and pottered through the swing bridge my? self. I lowered the foresail in calm water • though the wind was still screeching in the rigging • 'and motored up to the wharf. The ketch was akeady moored, and her crew took my lines. "Dirty out there," said the young Viking in command. "I was really scared," I said, remembering my vow. "Were you?" He was genuinely surprised. "I kept looking over at you, and you were doing fine. Every time I looked you were coming right on." It was my tum to be surprised. I looked at him and my little vessel, dwarfed by his ketch, and I felt a surge of affection. Well, well I thought, you did all right, little ship. And I suppose I did all right myself. It seemed to me suddenly ridiculous to think of selling her, ri? diculous to quit sailing, absurd to do anything about my fear except face it down and go on sailing. What I didn't understand then, and don't understand now, is that I can find no fault with my black analysis of things in the middle of the lake. SaiUng is expensive and demanding, it does deflect energy from the ~ Our 24th Year in Business ~ Canso Realities Ltd. Box 727 Port Hawkesbury, N. S. BOE 2V0 • Phone (902) 625-0302 • We carry 300 listings of property for sale in Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia. JIM MARCHAND ? BROKER (" mdb "KislrMctb/i specializing in Concrete Service " * Member of the Residential CanadianHome Builders Association Commercial Concrete Foundations Floors • Steps Lansing Small PRESIDENT / MANAGER Tel. 567-1900 51 Glencaim Ave. Sydney, N.S. i B1R1L5 5