

I arrived at Kennedy International with my beloved King 3-B trombone, the instrument I had mastered in high school. Mastered. I hung around the band room for weeks until, in my sophomore year, the director agreed to give me a lesson. One. That was the total amount of trombone lessons I ever had. After that, I spent many hours in my room (until the parents had a cow over that) and in the band room at school practicing, practicing, practicing, learning to play all the trombone parts to all of the music that the band was currently playing. I got good enough to make the pep band and travel with the basketball team to games, and sometimes the games were kind of boring, like the time we played Bangor Prep and they had us 88-20 at half-time, so Phil Patrick and I started smuggling "ponies," little eight-ounce beers, into our cases and making our way out the side door between periods to guzzle two or three before the second half, which did lots for our moods, but little for the quality of our playing; somehow we always were louder in the second half. I even played a solo during the spring concert, and a duet with this other guy at graduation.

It was during my junior year that I saved enough to buy the trombone that I carried in my left hand when I got off the plane in New York that day in January, 1976. It retailed for something like five-hundred bucks, which

was a lot of money at the time, but I got it for just under three with my student discount.

I had a suitcase in my other hand, and I was wearing my dress blue uniform of which I was so proud. I'd had it tailored to fit me, and I was in perfect condition at about a hundred-sixty-five pounds and just about five feet, ten inches tall, and I just know I looked impressive in it. I felt so anyway.

I caught a cab and took the forty-five minute ride to the ferry terminal, which cost me twenty dollars and a five-dollar tip. The driver was nice, pointing out the UN building, the trade center, the Brooklyn Bridge.

Soon, we arrived at the ferry terminal, which was right next to the Staten Island Ferry terminal, and I went inside and awaited the next boat.

I wasn't prepared for what I saw once inside. I looked at the man across the counter from me. He was my height, and his large, dark brown eyes were quite familiar. He wore glasses, wire-rimmed, and had a neatly-trimmed mustache, and when he smiled, I wasn't surprised that his cheeks exposed two canyon-deep dimples, one on either side of his mouth which had a full array of nice white teeth.

I was speechless as I stared at my identical twin brother.

"Can I help you?" He asked as he too, must have

seen the quite stunning resemblance.

"I-I-I--he--he--here's my, ah, my, my--"

"--Orders?"

"Yeah, uh, yes, sir, here's my orders." I handed him the large manila envelope.

"Hey man, I ain't no officer. Don't call me 'sir,' okay?"

"Yeah, of course, it's just that, well," and I gestured with my hand, first at him, then at me.

"We look a lot alike," he said. He actually said it to me.

"I'll say." I looked at his name badge.

"Steve Summey," he said as he extended his hand.

"Virgil Peal, from the "Aggressive." I'm here to play in the band."

"Great. You'll like it here. Lots of things to do, mega-doses of beautiful women, you name it, it's in New York."

"I'm not sure I'll have enough money to do much, it cost me twenty-five bucks just to get here from Kennedy. But we'll see."

"You need to get a subway map," he said, and my mind went to my Mom saying 'There's a lot of crime there,' and then the ferry pulled in, and I agreed to meet Steve in the enlisted club later.

Once on the ferry, I looked out over the cold East

river, out to the Statue of Liberty and the Staten Island Ferry which was making its way into the terminal, and across the channel to the island that would be my home for the next year, and the World Trade Center that loomed over Battery Park behind, and tried to relax. The plane ride was short, and I had a couple of belts up there, but the cab ride was frightening, and my journey was almost over.

I heard some guy above me screaming at some guy named Steve, over and over, and I finally looked up (I had been cautioned not to talk to anyone) and the guy was hollering in my direction.

"Hey, man, are you asleep? I thought you were on 'til midnight?"

I wondered who the guy was talking to when I realized that it was me.

"I'm not Steve, man, my name's Virgil. Steve is my twin brother."

"No fuckin' shit?"

"That's right." I looked at the balding man with dark features and a bulging gut, and he looked at me, and I thought You deserve to be bullshitted, so I never told him the difference.

Henry French met me at the gate and, after I had been checked in by the officer of the day he showed me my quarters.

"I'm the band director," he told me as we made our way to the on-base bowling alley where, he said, they had some pretty good food at reasonable prices, and I ordered a burger and some fries and a large glass of Miller Light.

"How many other players are there?" I asked.

"So far we've got four trumpets, three saxes, a couple of flutes, three trombones, including yourself, and two clarinets, not to mention four drummers and a tuba player, but we're expecting about ten more players before summer hits."

"Sounds good. What gigs have we got planned?"

"Plenty. Believe me, we are going to be one busy band. Tell me, how long have you been playing?"

"Just school, but I was awarded a music scholarship at the University of Oregon, but I had already raised my right hand and sworn myself to four years of the fuckin' Guard, so I had to refuse it. All in all, I'm not a bad player, but it has been a few months--"

"--don't worry about that. Most of the folks in the band haven't played for a while, but we'll be up and ready by the time all the shit hits the fan."

I ate my burger and drank my beer and looked around the place as Henry told me about the base, New York, and his experience. There were thirty-five lanes, a few pool tables, the snack bar and a pro shop. I loved a bowling

alley in the daytime; not much noise and confusion, and the smell of alley wax and shoe spray blending with the burgers on the grill is pleasant. As I looked around I couldn't help but notice a very attractive young lady who was tending to business behind the main counter. Since there wasn't much activity she was straightening shoes and doing paperwork. Her hair was dark and long, and her face was tawny and angular. She appeared, from my vantage point, to be slender with a good figure.

"--so I figured what the hell? I might as well join up, and that's how I got here."

"That's interesting," I didn't know what to say since I hadn't heard most of what Henry just told me, and I think he could tell. He looked at me through his government issue spectacles, his chubby cheeks making his regulation corner-of-the-mouth mustache look even smaller, and caught me gandering over his shoulder at the beauty behind the counter.

He turned around, then quickly back.

"I see you've noticed Patty. Forget about it, Virgil, she's the Admiral's daughter and is engaged to a Lieutenant aboard one of those three-eighteen's that you saw down at the pier."

"Hey, man, I was just looking. She's very pretty."

"Yeah, you got that right, and, from what I hear, she used to be quite a wild one. Then she met this guy,

a spit and polish kind right out of the academy and bam, that was it. Apparently being engaged to the Admiral's daughter has been pretty good for his career, he made Second Louie pretty damn fast."

I finished my beer and Henry went to the men's room, so I figured Why not say hello to the woman behind the counter.

"Hi." I suddenly hadn't a clue as to what to say to her. She was beautiful.

"Can I help you?"

"No, just wanted to say hello, you know, I'm new on the island and thought I might get to know some folks here." Some of the folks!

She smiled. "I'm Trish. Hospodar."

"Virgil Peal. What kind of a name is that?"

"Oh, it's short for Patricia--"

"--no, I mean the last."

"Quick." She raised her eyes, but not her head to show that she was being facetious.

"That's Dutch. It means 'giver of hospitality.'"

She was pretty up close, too, and I was right about her figure; petite. We shook hands and I looked over at the other one.

"Wow, what a ring."

"It's almost two carats. Brendan, he's my fiance, said it was the biggest one they had over at Conover's,

and I flipped when I saw it, too."

"He must be really something. I'd like to meet him."

"Well, that will have to wait, he's out to sea for another month, and then we're going on leave for two weeks to St. Thomas, sort of a pre-honeymoon, and then the wedding is in June, of course, but you'll like him."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, everybody likes Brendan Midgett."

As soon as I heard 'Midgett,' I knew what she meant. The name has a long and glorious tradition in the Coast Guard, going back to when it was the Lifesaving Service and a time when ships were wood and men were steel. The Midgett's of North Carolina's Outer Banks, particularly the area known as Hatteras Island, were rugged seafarers who weathered the worst storms, pulling their long, heavy surf boats through the breakers to rescue survivors of wrecks upon the shifting shoals off the coast known as the "Graveyard of The Atlantic," and walking the beaches searching for ships in distress while the blowing sand chapped their skin for hours at a time. I had read about these men, in fact, I think it was their romanticism that ended up being one of the reasons I had decided to join up; I wanted to be a man who braved the elements and the lonely hours of isolation to help others. But it didn't take long to find that such idealistic goals are simply

the things that only dreams are made of.

My chest wanted to cave in as the young woman talked. I had never before seen such a perfectly beautiful woman, and I was surprised that I could even speak to her. I wondered what she was doing working in a bowling alley. I wondered what she was doing working at all.

"Well, it's nice talking to you," I started when I saw Henry returning from the men's room, a piece of toilet paper stuck to his shoe, "and I hope to see you again soon."

"Bye Virgil," she said, and smiled again. That smile! Her eyes followed mine a moment longer than was necessary, a split second really, but it was long enough to send my heart reeling.

"Henry," I walked quickly towards the door that he was headed for, "you got a piece of toilet paper stuck to your shoe."

He looked down and scraped his foot along the ground until it came loose.

"So you met Patty, huh?"

"She said her name was 'Trish.' Quite the fucking ring, don't you think?"

"Virgil, I'm telling you, stay the fuck away from that girl. Unless you want your stay to be short here in New York, forget about her. I need you in the band,

particularly if you're as good as you say you are--"

"--I am--"

"--good, then let's make sure you don't do anything that will get your ass in a sling, like trying to score on the fuckin' Admiral's daughter."

"Don't be ridiculous, Henry, I would never do anything like that." As soon as I said it I knew that it was a lie, or at least sort of a lie. She had wrested my soul from the torment of the last few months, and ignited a fire that swarmed throughout my body, and I wasn't going to pretend that she didn't exist, even if it meant trouble later on.

"Come on," he said, "let's go to the band room."

"Let's go by my room first so I can get my horn."

As we walked across the quadrangle I looked up at the twin towers of the World Trade Center, rising through the smog-infested atmosphere which smelled like snow, and thought I live in New York City now, I'm really here. Again.

I was seven years old when we piled into the '59 Chevy, Gretchen, Chuck, my parents and me, and headed out on the warm summer day to the world's fair, and the great city of New York.

We were travelling along the cross-Bronx thruway when my mother pointed to the vastness of buildings and highways and cars and said, "There it is, kids, New York, the city that never sleeps."

I was young and don't remember much, bits and pieces really, but the one thing I never understood was how in the world did we ever afford it? My parents were always crying poor mouth, and I felt guilty just getting a new pair of shoes or a dollar for the movies, but here we were, going on a real vacation, to somewhere we had never been before. Mom and Dad actually seemed happy, unusually calm and patient with things like traffic and making wrong turns and what have you, and I didn't know how to act.

We stayed at a college dormitory somewhere north of the city and drove in each day, past the Empire State Building, which I had heard of, to the fair grounds. I remember the huge, transparent globe, the "Unisphere," and the massive orange atop the Florida Pavilion. We rode in new cars through the Ford Pavilion and strapped in to a ferris wheel which looked like a giant tire. We

watched dolphin shows and, late at night, listened to Billy Graham over a loudspeaker. Gretchen got a pen-pal in the Chinese Pavilion, and I had my first char-grilled hamburger that I hated but ate rather than waste. We went into this huge building where a man was throwing a small, purple ball at the floor as hard as he could. The ball would then fly high, all the way to the ceiling which must have been about a hundred feet up and then came down, hitting the floor again, and then up, and up, almost to where it had gone to before. I had never seen a ball with so much bounce, and my dad bought one for me. Around the corner there were two guys throwing a plastic disk about a foot in diameter to each other, the first time I ever saw a Frisbee.

It was a good time, I guess, and the car didn't break down once, which made the task of Dad loading his entire tool box into the trunk before we left unnecessary. God, was he proud of that tool box. Filled with every kind of hand tool imaginable, things like vise grips and crescent wrenches, not to mention an array of screwdrivers, both slotted and phillips, hammers, chisels, sockets, ratchets, you name it, he had at least one of everything. And he guarded them with his life. They were his tools, "his," perhaps the only thing left in his life that he could truly call that, and when Chuck or I would ask to borrow them, he reluctantly said yes,

but to put them back, which we sometimes didn't do as kids will not sometimes, and he would rant and rave and swear and angrily forbid us from borrowing them again, until we could take more responsibility for them.

But there were so many tools that when he put them in the trunk (whenever we went on a trip, usually to my Grandmother's house) the car sank down quite a bit, and often they would take up more room than we could spare and he would cuss and fume and demand that my mother leave some clothes behind. One time, when I was going to Grandma's for the summer, I had to leave my bicycle behind so that he could have enough room in the trunk for his beloved tools.

And, on an occasion we did have to use them, he would say "See, see, aren't you glad I brought those tools now? What'd I tell you. See kids, see? Preparation. Ready for anything. Why, if I didn't bring those tools, it would have cost us an arm and a leg just to get towed. Ha, saved a bundle, that's what we did."

When we got home, we had a lot of happy memories, and a flip-card pack of post cards, and I wondered if I ever wanted to go back to see the city that never sleeps.

"Miracles" by the Starship was playing on the juke box in the enlisted club, and it took me back to boot camp, when it was number one in the country, and the

small recruit lounge that Wilkerson and I had the pleasure of working in.

In its eighth week of basic training, your company has to work in the boot camp mess deck, serving, doing dishes, prepping, cleaning tables, whatever, and two lucky recruits from that same company get to work in the recruit lounge, making sandwiches, burgers, pizza, shakes, etc., and Wilkerson and I got the nod. We didn't have to get up as early as the others in our company, and we didn't have to work like dogs in the mess deck like they did, and mostly we got to sit around and shoot the shit until it was time to open.

I thought it would be the gravy train, until I remembered to add one ingredient to the recipe: Big Ed. Big Ed was a lifer in the navy until he retired and began a new career in the Guard. He was a huge man with massive arms, no hair, and a flip New Jersey accent. No one could help but notice the way he treated the two guys who had to work for him. He was always screaming at them, calling them names, making them feel like shit simply because they spilled some chocolate syrup on the counter.

"What's wrong with you, Idiot? Can't you keep your area clean? Can't you do anything right? What are you, some kind of complete jerk or something?! Come on, come on, hurry up, Lazy. My Grandmother works faster than

either of you two..." I always had mixed feelings for the two young, scared faces behind the counter. I felt sorry for them, yes. But I was also very glad that it was them, not me.

So of course, I got to work for Ed for one week, and as Wilkerson and I made our way to the lounge on our first day of work, I wondered if he was as scared as I was.

"Oh, man, you know Ed is going to have fun with us, treat us like garbage, scream at us, and I'm not looking forward to it. Listen, Peal, just don't let him get to you."

"Yeah, right, it can't be that bad." We walked through the door. The place was empty. Nobody was in sight and I checked behind the counter that was behind the two pool tables. Nothing. Out in the bigger area, where there were most of the tables, I noticed that a door was ajar, a door that I had never seen open before, and I got Wilkerson's attention and pointed. We walked towards the door. Then we heard the singing:

'Oly, 'oly anus

'Oly, 'oly anus

'Oly, 'oly , 'oly 'oly, 'oly 'oly anus.

We sailed the good ship "Venus,"

My god you should have seen us,

The figure head was a whore in bed
And the mast was an upright penis.

Oh

'Oly, 'oly anus--

"--Fellas! Hi how ya doin'?" A jolly, Santa Clause sort of man poked his head out of the door, a smile beaming from ear to ear, sweat pouring off of the bald head, and a warmth in his eyes that inhaled my anxiety.

"I'm just goin' over inventory, makin' out an order, why don't you just grab a soda or something and have a seat for a while?"

Wilkerson and I looked at each other. Was this the same guy who riddled people constantly? Who called your mother names? Who made you feel inadequate? I mean, he was smiling!

"Oh, and while you're behind the counter, check things out and see if I need some more ice cream behind there, okay? I'll be back after a while. And drop some of those red quarters in the juke box, will you? It's too quiet around here." And out the door he went. Wilkerson was smiling, and so was I.

I dropped the quarters in the machine and punched "A-28."

If only you believed in miracles, baby, in

miracles,
We could fly
If only you believed in miracles, baby, in
miracles,
So would I...

"Hey, Virgil." My daydream was interrupted by Steve, who pulled up a seat at my table.

"Steve, hi, how are you feeling?"

"Great. Hey, you find your way around the base a bit, yet?"

"Yeah, some." He was wearing jeans and a purple cabled sweater, otherwise he still looked like me. I studied him for a few moments. Did I really look like that? He wasn't dashing, but not ugly either. His shoulders were so broad, his stomach flat. Hell, he even had the same wire-rimmed glasses as me. In fact, my regulation-cut mustache, though not dense, made me look like the evil twin.

"The band director and I had lunch at the bowling alley, and then he gave me the nickel tour."

"So what do you think?"

"I think I'm going to enjoy my stay here very nicely. I met 'Trish Hospodar--"

"--You mean the Admiral's daughter?"

"Yeah, over at the alley. She seemed pretty nice,

cordial and all--"

"--Stay away from her, Virgil, she's thoroughly taken."

"I know, Steve, some Lieutenant named Midgett, right?"

"Right. And she's like a piece of cheese sitting on a rat trap; everything seems perfect until those gold bars come crashing down on your neck."

I laughed. "Thanks for the warning, it's not the first."

"It won't be the last, either. She was hot after me when I first came back in seventy-two. She was only seventeen then, but you know service brats, she had been around some even then."

I remembered Denise Larson, an Air Force lifer's daughter who had seduced me when I was in the tenth grade and she was a freshman. Man she knew more about boys than I did, and had been the most passionate young woman I had perhaps ever known. She was lithe, tall, pretty with long legs, and I would walk her home and stay there until late, then we would go out into her foyer and make out, and I would push her up against the wall and hold her smooth behind in my hands and pump and pump, all the time kissing, tongues exploring the innermost depths of each other's mouth, and then I would explode, filling my crotch with the heat, and then we would just stare at

each other as our breathing returned to normal and I would kiss her and walk home in the cold, my crotch freezing me the whole way. And I swear, I loved her.

"Yes, I know service brats," I told Steve.

"What can I get for you?" our waitress asked.

"I want a beer, what imports do you have?"

"Let's see, I got Miller, Bud, Schlitz, Molson, Molson draft--"

"That's what I want," said Steve.

"Me, too."

"Okay, two Molson Drafts. Hey," she looked at us. First Steve, then me, then Steve again. "You two twins?"

Before Steve could say anything, I spoke. "Yes, that's right. We're twins. We had different mother's, but we're twins."

"Wow, twins from different mothers, I never heard of such a thing." She was still shaking her head as she walked toward the bar and Steve lost it first, then me, laughing like a couple of mental patients who were seeing the Three Stooges for the first time.

We had another round and I was starting to feel more at home, at ease, and I suggested some bowling.

"You just want to go see Miss Hot Box again--"

"--No, Steve, really, I haven't been bowling for some time and I'd like to. Come on."

"I think she only works days--"

"Steve!"

"Okay, let me finish my beer."

Of course, seeing Trish again wasn't something I dreaded, but I really did want to do something active.

When we arrived, I realized that I wasn't the only one who wanted to bowl. The place was jammed, and all the alleys were being used, so different from earlier, and I hated the confusion. I made my way to the counter, but Trish was no where in sight.

"Can I help you?" The fat guy behind the counter had a cigar hanging out of his mouth, and his gut hung over his trousers which were held up by a pair of red suspenders. He looked at me over his half-rims.

"Where's Trish?"

"She only works days. You want to bowl?"

"Yeah, yes, we'd like to get an alley."

"Okay, you're number eight on the list, what's the name?"

I told him, and asked how long a wait there was.

"These guys," he said, pointing over his shoulder to the alleys, "should be over any minute. It's a league."

I told him that we would be in the bar, and Steve and I headed there. Steve bought us another round of Molson, they had it on draft there, too, and we sat and drank until an alley was available, rented shoes, bowled a few games, he beat the pants off me, ordered more beer

and a pizza, bowled some more.

By the time the pizza was ready, the two of us were pretty well shitfaced, and I did something that was to become a standard with me. Drunk on my ass, I was oblivious to the heat of the pizza just out of the oven, and I took a big bite, and proudly burnt the roof of my mouth. Of course, I didn't know it then, but the next morning I could feel quite clearly the pain and the shredded tissue that collected in my mouth.

And that was the routine for the New York nights. First the enlisted club, then the bowling alley, staggering back to my quarters, and awaking the next morning to the remnants of the roof of my mouth in my Cheerios. Until one night in March.

We had just done a concert at one of the local high schools, out on Long Island somewhere, and we just made the seven-o'clock ferry, put our stuff away in the band room, and I made my way to the enlisted club. Steve had duty until eleven, so I decided to get something to eat there also.

But, after I walked through the door I noticed a certain Miss Hospodar sitting alone at the bar, so I went over to say hello.

"Well Virgil, how have you been?" She was well-oiled, and most friendly as I sat and she put her hand on my thigh. My thigh!

"I'm fine. Sorry I haven't been over to see you, but the band is gone just about every day now, and your off every night. How's Brendan?" I don't give a shit about Brendan, I thought, with an anxious smile.

"Well he's great, don't you know. He's on duty tonight, on his ship, and I thought I'd just have a drink or two and then go down to see him. Want to walk down with me?"

I glanced at my watch and decided I had enough time to take a walk with her. She stood and I saw just how short her white skirt was, barely covering the property, and her black leather jacket (nothing underneath) matched her heels, but the ring was the biggest thing on her. It made her look like a little girl playing dress-up.

That March was warm, but there was a slight chill in the night air and she slipped her arm around my waist as we walked, so I draped mine around her shoulder, and the rhythm of her hip bouncing against my thigh warmed me, the feel of a woman's body next to mine, the faint scent of perfume and shampoo that I hadn't known for a while excited me, and I walked a bit stiff-legged.

"Where'd you come from, Virgil?"

"I'm temporarily assigned here from the "Aggressive," in New Hampshire."

"I've heard of that ship, where, where did I hear about that ship?"

"Heard of the "Aggressive?" I don't know. When?"

"Recently. Oh, I know. Did somebody drown off of it or something?"

"Yes." That hurt. The few months since Heflin's accident had gone quickly, and I had tried not to think about it much. She must have noticed that I slowed my pace.

"Did you know the guy?"

"He was my best friend."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Really. Let's change the subject."

"Pete Heflin," I said, even though she didn't ask his name. "I tried to get him to come in from the weather deck, but the ship lurched, and he lost his grip and fell in--"

"Never mind, Virgil. I didn't mean to pry."

"--He didn't jump--"

"No, no. Of course not. Let's talk about something else."

And I could see him, riding next to me on his brand new Yamaha, one handed, trying to light a cigarette as we moved along the serpentine coastal route through Rye, waving to the pretty lifeguard at Wentworth, never getting the courage up to stop and talk to her even though she always waved back enthusiastically in her tiny red bikini. Why him?

"Virgil? Hello? Remember me?"

"Oh, yeah, sorry." I didn't realize that I had stopped walking, but now Trish was standing in front of me, looking up at me with those huge eyes. She took my face in her hands.

"It's going to be alright, baby. Believe me." And her mouth was turned downward in a sympathetic pout, but it wasn't put on or anything. She looked as if she might burst out crying at any moment. We started to walk again, arm in arm, and she spoke.

"My best friend, she was a diabetic. We horsed around all through school. Our fathers were somehow always stationed together, until we were seniors and Dad got sent here and Shari went to Cape May. I think I was the only one who she ever told that she was homosexual. I guess I always knew, though.

"One night, after I had been here about two months, she called. She sounded different on the phone, laughing a lot, then sounding real sad, and I thought she must be going into shock, you know about diabetic shock?"

I told her I didn't.

"Well, I don't know that much, but apparently it has something to do with the blood-sugar level going haywire, either due to too much or too little sugar in their system. Anyhow, I told her to put her mom on the phone, but Shari just laughed and said that they were gone out for the evening. She told me that she had been drinking

since they left, and that, for diabetics, is a complete no-no. I got scared.

"She told me that she missed me very much, and how much she really loved me, and that she would come to New York to see me when school let out for Spring break. I told her to do something about her sugar level, and she started crying and said 'everything's going to be alright, Trish,' and then she hung up."

"You miss her, huh?" I asked. And Trish knew what I meant.

"They found her the next day, in her room with an empty bottle of Seconal and an almost empty bottle of Boone's Farm on the floor next to her bed. Can you imagine the pain that that poor girl had to live with?

She gave me a moment to imagine.

Yes, I miss her. But I did get over her suicide. I realized that she was never happy in this world, and that anything was better than--"

"That's true, but my friend Pete didn't commit suicide. He fell, remember?"

"Yes. But death at a young age is tragic no matter the circumstances. I just know that time will help you."

Everything I had heard about the lady on my arm said nothing about the tenderness inside, and I was astonished to realize that I might have met a woman who could be beautiful, intelligent, and caring, who could see and

feel with not just her eyes or her hands. I finally decided to change the subject.

"Listen, you're going to marry this guy Brendan, but you're walking arm-in-arm with me, and I get the feeling that you kind of like it, that it's just not a friendly walk in the night. Why do I get that feeling?"

"I don't know, we're going to see him, after all, aren't we?"

"Yes, I guess we are. I don't know."

We both fell silent as we approached the lighted quarterdeck of the Marshall, a three-hundred-eighteen foot cutter which specialized in long-term coastal patrol. I stopped a few yards short of the small shack and sat down on the concrete pier abutment as Trish went over and spoke to the Quartermaster on duty. I wondered if he was getting high.

She came back a few moments later, sat next to me, and spoke.

"He's not here. He had to go over to another ship and help with some chart problems over there. Wanna go over there?"

"Not really. I gotta go. I promised Steve that I'd--"

"Okay, where? I'll go with you."

"I don't understand."

"Virgil Peal, I would like to be with you tonight."

She was not exactly smiling, not exactly frowning, but there was some expression on her face that I could not place.

I looked at her, then at the guy in the shack. He was busy with some paper work and he was looking down. I glanced around to see if anyone was watching, then, deciding that we were pretty much alone, I leaned over and kissed her. What lips! She responded and I pulled her close. I pulled away, hearing the warning voices in my head, and she asked me what was that for.

"I don't know, I just wanted to kiss you, that's all."

"I don't mean the kiss, I mean the pulling away so fast."

"Oh," what was I going to say? That everybody has told me to stay clear of you? That I know about you and your using men? That I'm falling for you?

"You're afraid of Brendan, aren't you?"

"Not afraid, exactly. Maybe not even of Brendan."

"You're afraid of me? I won't bite, honestly."

"Maybe I'm afraid of what I might do." What a lie.

"Virgil," she said, and moved closer to me, "I need you tonight, I don't know why, but somehow I feel you need me too."

I nodded. "God, I like you, Trish. I've never met

anyone like you before, and I can't believe that you are going to get--"

"Shhhhh, don't think about that."

Every emotion I had ever felt, and some that I didn't recognize, were making their way to the surface and I felt like I would explode in laughter or tears or something any second.

"Come on," and she took my hand as she stood, helped me to my feet and noticed the protrusion in my pants. "Can you walk okay?" she asked, and laughed, and I laughed and said I'd try, but how far did we have to go?

"Let's go to my house. Daddy's gone to California, and Mom's staying with a friend in New London, and we can have the whole place to ourselves."

We grab-assed the whole way and when we got to about thirty yards from her house, mansion really, I scooped the petite brunette up in my arms and carried her to the door. I put her down and she got out the key. When we were in side, I couldn't wait. I wrapped my arms around her waist and lifted her up as we kissed. I glazed my hands over her ass and then pulled her skirt up high. She unzipped me and took my pants down, then reached her hand down in front and squeezed me. I pulled her panty hose and panties down in one motion and we eased to the floor, and then I was inside her, pumping, pumping and she was lifting her hips up to meet each thrust and then

it was over.

I propped myself up on my hands and looked into her eyes. She smiled, still faintly pumping and I knew that she wanted more.

"I have got to piss," I said, and slipped out of her and into the bathroom under the stairs. I still had quite a stiff erection, and it was difficult to hit the toilet, but I did my best. I flushed and stood in front of the mirror, washing my hands and wiping the sweat from my face, and, right before I snapped the light off and went out for round two, I looked into the eyes of the man in the mirror. I was surprised at how old he looked. "You," I said aloud to him, "have just made it with the Admiral's daughter. Why not go do it again?" and I smiled and winked at him, and I was gone.

I woke the next morning to the sound of the shower, and, as I rubbed my eyes I realized that the room we had ended up in belonged to the Admiral and his wife, to the mother and father of the lady in the shower. I went in to join her.

"Hi. How'd you sleep?" She looked great even in the morning.

I stretched and yawned. "Pretty well, I guess. What time is it?"

"Clock's over there." She pointed to the wall next to the vanity where a miniature ships-wheel clock hung,

and, after determining that the hands indicated nine-thirty, it took a minute to hit me.

"Shit, I'm late for practice."

"Don't worry," she called over the sound of the water, "I'll write you a note." I heard the laughter, the contagious laughter, and thought about the marathon of the previous night, and I could feel my testicles swirling. I hopped into the shower and Trish already had a natural sponge filled with soap in her hand and she started to wash me all over. My back, down to the crack of my rear-end, around to my chest and finally down to my swelling penis. She turned me so that I was facing the falling water and the soap rinsed off, then she turned me around again and she was sitting on the edge of the tub, staring at my hard-on and licking her lips. As she moved for it, I grabbed her shoulders and lifted her head by her chin so that she was looking at me. Was she beautiful.

"I've got to go to practice," I said.

"Sure, I know," and she reached around and sunk her nails into my butt and swallowed the whole shaft, then pulled all the way back, over and over again, down so that I could feel her throat relaxing, opening up to welcome me, and I couldn't stand it anymore and I came, and I came, and I came, and then my legs went out from under me and I slipped down, grabbing the curtain,

tearing it from the rings that held it to the rod, and I fell to the floor carrying Trish with me as she would not let go, and we lay there, me laughing, Trish finishing up every last drop.

And, if it were up to me, I would have stayed right there on the bathroom floor forever, endorphins screaming on their journey to every part of my body, the two of us draped by the emerald green shower curtain, the sound of the warm water tapping on it. But I had to go, and Trish let me up, said not to worry about the mess, and kissed me hard on the lips and I tasted my own semen for the first time.

After I had dressed, Trish came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, and just stood there in the doorway, leaning against the jam.

"See you later?"

"You can count on it," I said, and, as I reached for my glasses on the night stand, I noticed the huge diamond ring, and I wondered about when he had given it to her. It must have been one of those engagements parties with caterers and a band, and all of their parent's friends wishing them well over gallons of champagne, and Patricia Hospodar, gazing into the eyes of the bright, handsome Lieutenant, promising to be his and only his forever, until death do they part, and then I looked at her, standing there in nothing but a towel, knowing that she

would never be faithful to him, or me, or anybody for that matter, and at that moment, she dropped the towel, blew me a kiss, said "later," and disappeared behind the closed door.

"Word has it that you've got a girlfriend." Henry looked at me through those regulation glasses of his, and I could tell that he wasn't happy. It had been two months since that first night with Trish, and although we had tried to be discreet, apparently someone had spotted us together. Oh, not that we spent that much time together, the moments were rare indeed what with Brendan ashore and all. But they had been beautiful moments, and I sensed a change inside of me, a newfound sense of feeling that had me walking on air most of the time.

"Who said that?"

"Never mind who said so, more important is who is your lady friend? I told you, this base is smaller'n a snail's butthole, word travels faster'n greased owl shit around here, boy. Now, what the fuck is goin' on?"

"Listen, Henry, there's no reason to get excited, it's not who you think it is, so don't worry, okay?"

"Virgil, that's not what I hear. I hear that you're banging the old man's daughter on a regular basis. And if I'm hearing it that means that a certain Lieutenant has for sure heard of it, and my guess is that he'll be after you like a seagull after a rotting clam."

I just looked at my feet, around his office at the big scheduling calendar in the wall, then returned to his stare.

"Look, man, I tried to warn you that this might happen. I can't afford to lose you and I know that they'll ship you out faster than--"

"Listen, Henry, it's not happening, so don't worry about it, okay? I'm seeing a civilian who works in the cafeteria, that's all. And she's Black, so that's probably what all the fuss is about." I was smiling now, and Henry knew that I was bullshitting, but he pretended to believe me anyway.

"Okay, man. Just watch your step. I've seen things like this get way out of hand. It's like watchin' your parents screw; it ain't a pretty sight."

"Virgil," the call came from out in the band room, "are you going to practice with us or not?"

"I'll be right there, Lenny." Lenny Bonardi was the best bass player I had ever heard, and his little combo needed a guitarist and singer, and I didn't mind playing at all. We played at the officers club, the chiefs club, the enlisted club, and any number of parties and gatherings that needed music, and we got paid pretty well too.

"We got the old man's daughter's wedding coming up and I want us to be perfect. He doesn't need much in the way of special requests, only that we play "King Of The Road," at least a dozen times."

"Yeah, and that Virgil keep his fucking dick in his

trousers," Henry called from the other room.

We both laughed, and I picked up my beat-up Harmony guitar and sat down to practice. It was a piece of junk. I bought it at a little store in my home town of Camden, on the coast of Maine, when I was a freshman in High school for eighty bucks and it had seen a lot of action, but it didn't sound all that bad. How I wanted another, a Martin D-28 like the one I played in the shop in Portsmouth with Ricky, but I didn't have the money.

"When are you going to replace that axe of yours," asked Marty Simone, our sax player.

"Oh, first thing in the morning. You're going to lend me the money, aren't you?"

"Why don't you get a loan from the credit union? The interest is pretty low, and even you can qualify."

"Yeah," said Lenny, "and you'll never find it cheaper than over at Horton and Wilson, on fifty-second street."

"You think I could?"

"Sure, why not?"

The next Saturday the three of us hopped the ferry (the fat ferry captain looked at me funny, and I found out later that Steve had told him that we weren't twins after all) and jumped the subway over at battery park uptown to Horton and Wilson. I tried out about ten different guitars and selected one, a brand new Martin D-

28, that ended up costing me about five-hundred, way less than I could have gotten it anywhere else.

By the time the wedding rolled around, Trish and I had been seeing each other for about three months, off and on, whenever there was time, and I was in love with her, I just knew it. I was so upset with the idea that she had not called off her wedding. I mean, we had such a good thing, I couldn't imagine that she actually wanted someone else.

I walked into the bowling alley one day late in May and saw Trish talking to a man, not much older than I, and she was laughing and flirting with him, and I couldn't believe it, but I was jealous. As I made my way over I studied him. He was short, stocky, had dark hair, a beard and mustache, and his voice, which I could hear as I got closer, was strange sounding, sort of New Englandish and sort of southern too, and he was using words like "utilize," and "appropriate" and "form of transportation," and I thought College Boy, and then Trish noticed me and her smile faded and she waved slightly and the look in her eye was strained, but she called me closer.

"Virgil Peal, I'd like you to meet my fiance, Brendan Midgett."

"Lieutenant Midgett, to you," and he smiled to show that he was just kidding, and I offered my hand but

couldn't get it all the way into his before he was squeezing it and smiling, like those assholes who just have to prove that they're a man and I said that I had heard a lot about him and his famous family and I managed to free my hand before it collapsed in on itself.

"Oh really? How have you heard about me? I'm not post-mortem yet, the usual criteria for legendary prowess in my family."

"Well, Trish has mentioned you quite a bit; can't keep her quiet about you for a minute. You're a lucky man."

"Well, thank you, I happen to concur with that opinion. Listen, Virg," he wrapped his arm around my shoulder and guided me off toward the pool tables and I looked over my shoulder at Trish who just shrugged, "you see a lot of Trish, do you?"

"Well, some, you know, here and there." I was shitting my pants.

He was gripping my upper arm tighter and tighter every second. "Listen, Peal, I've heard that someone's been putting the moves on my fiance, you know, trying to replace me when I'm out to sea."

"Oh,-----really, sir?" He knows!

"Yes, Peal. You, ah, you wouldn't know anything about that would you?"

"No, sir." Too quick an answer, you fool. He knows

now! Idiot!

"Well, I figure it this way. Since you seem to see an awful lot of Trish, I started putting two and two together."

"Listen, Lieutenant, I never met anyone like Trish before, and I never like to get in the middle of two people who really care for each other--"

"But, you're the only one I can trust."

"--but I got to tell you, this fiance of yours--"

Did he say "trust?" "Ah, come again, sir?"

"I think it's that guy Summey, who works at the ferry terminal. Now, I'd like you to keep your eyes open for any sign of that son-of-a-bitch around Trish. Stick around her. If he so much as looks at her, you call me on the ship, okay?"

"Well,-yeah, okay, I guess. But how do you know that it's him?"

"Well, I don't exactly. He's an old boyfriend of Trish's. Hell, she was only seventeen years old and that bastard was sniffin' around her door, girl barely got her feet on the island before he was hot after her. A friend said he saw him talking to Trish in the enlisted club a couple of weeks ago." Was this guy bagging me or what? Did he not see the obvious similarity between Steve and me? Yes, that's it! He knows it's me, that's why all the squeezing hands and shoulders; he's playing me for a

fool. I made a mental note to get Steve to tell me about his relationship with Trish. He never said anything about what happened between them.

"Ah."

"So you'll do it then?"

"Sure, Lieutenant--"

"Hey, we're off duty, call me Brendan, okay?"

"Brendan, then," and we walked back to the counter.

"Virgil's going to be playing in the band at our wedding, Brendan. He plays guitar and sings."

"Really? Do you know "Danny's Song," by Kenny Loggins?"

"Sure."

"Well, maybe you could find it in your heart to perform it at the nuptials, what do you say?"

"Yeah, that'd be fine, why not? Look, I gotta go. Nice to meet you, sir--"

"uh, uh, uh,---Brendan." And he offered his hand, but I pretended not to notice and made for the door.

"Brendan. 'Bye, Trish."

Leaving that building was like leaving the ship for the last time, I never wanted to go back. I broke into a run and then, then I was at camp, church camp, and I was about eight years old and we were standing in line at the cafeteria, and without trying to, a big kid in front

of me turned quickly and caught me in the nose with his elbow and then I was losing control and crying and the other kids were laughing at me and I ran, I turned and ran as fast as I could, up the long dirt road to the highway where I finally stopped running, and then I was hitchhiking. A big white cadillac stopped and when I told them that I was headed to Augusta, which was three hours away, the woman looked at the man and they said "sorry," and pulled slowly away, and soon my uncle and another man pulled alongside me in my uncle's Buick Electra and then I was running again and my uncle the other man were chasing me through a field and the other guy caught me and dragged me back to the car and they took me the three miles back to camp where I had to swallow my pride and face the other guys and they treated me differently than before; they looked at me like I was crazy.

As I walked, something deep inside bothered me. I couldn't put my finger on it, but it hurt, like when you have an itch in your ear and you can't quite get to it either through your ear or inside your mouth, and then the top of your head starts to itch, and then your foot, and pretty soon you itch all over but you just can't seem to touch it. You feel so out of control.

That was it! I was trying to control something that was clearly out of my control. The question is, was I

trying to control it only because it was out of my control? That is, if it were in my control, would I want so badly to control it? What in the world was "it?"

A telephone booth. I don't know why I noticed it, but there it was, and no one was using the phone inside, and I went in and closed the door, picked up the receiver and dropped a dime in the slot. I dialled.

"Governor's Lanes."

Oh Christ, what the fuck to say.

"Trish?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

"Uh, it's Virg. Virgil."

"Hi, why'd you take off so fast? I think Brendan likes you."

How could she be so comfortable with herself? Didn't she want to collapse when I entered the alley? How could she hide her obvious hunger for me? It's so obvious.

"Uh, yeah, yeah--I suppose so. He did squeeze my hand pretty hard, though. I think he could tell that something's going on. You know, I, uh, I---"

"You, uh, what?" she asked, mocking my stutter.

"Well, I got the feeling that he knows that you're in love with me."

Dead silence.

Looooooooooooonnnnnnnnnnnng pause.

"Trish?"

"I'm here."

"Well, do you think so?"

"Hold on a sec."

You said the "L" word, Virgil. You said it, you didn't shake or anything, and now she's trying to collect herself because you caught her off guard and yes, yes, yes, she does so love you. She didn't count on loving you. She didn't see it coming, but there it is, out in the open, and now what can she do? She'll have to break-

-
"You still there?" What was that sound in her voice?

Crying?

Was she crying?

Yes, dammit, she was blubbering her eyes out and, oh God, probably Brendan is right there and she's telling him that she's sorry, but, well, she's fallen in love with another guy and she never saw it coming, but there it is, true love.

"Yeah, I'm here. I'll always be--"

"Listen, I gotta go." That sound again.

"Okay. We'll talk soon?"

The sound.

"Yeah, soon. 'Bye, Virg."

I hung up and walked quickly toward my barracks,

glancing around every now and then, just in case old Brendan was on the warpath. The sun seemed brighter, the clouds in the distance whispered of an afternoon storm, and the rays from the brightest sun poured down, "drawing water" my father used to say. Boy, would he be surprised to see me walk up the front steps with the Admiral's daughter on my arm, forget the fact that she is beautiful, intelligent, trim, sophisticated.

The Admiral's daughter. I could see the papers now.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Peal of Camden announce the engagement of their son, Virgil Isaac, to Miss Patricia Hospodar of New York City. Miss Hospodar is the daughter of Admiral and Mrs. Andrew Hospodar, also of New York. Admiral Hospodar is the Commandant of the Eastern Fleet of the United States Coast Guard. Mr. Peal is stationed on Governor's Island, New York.

Together we would walk into the club, and everyone would turn to watch the happy couple, the savvy young musician who swept the ADMIRAL'S DAUGHTER right out of the arms of the wealthy, famous Lieutenant.

"Hey look! It's Virgil and Trish. Hi!"

"She's the most beautiful woman on base, and he's

one handsome fellow, too."

"Man, he's the luckiest son-of-a-bitch I know!"

Ha, just like in high school, I would be the envy of all the men, and Trish would be the happiest woman in the world.

As I walked, I smiled at everyone I saw, saying "hello," and "how ya doin'" and watched the children playing in the small park, their mothers busily swapping gossip, chattering away, punctuated now and then by the sound of constrained laughter--

Laughter. The sound of laughter.

The sound.

Then I heard the voice on the other end of the phone, and I heard The Sound. Not tears, not from the heart, but laughter, constrained laughter. Not the free-flow of unlocked love, but the held-back guffaw toward my own stupidity. Not the apple of her eye, but the punchline of a joke.

If I had been stripped naked and yanked aloft by my testicles in front of all my old girlfriends, it would not have hurt as bad.

I walked, slower now, wanting to step in front of a moving truck, wanting Trish to step in front of a moving truck, thinking things like That Bitch, and How could she do such a thing?, and finally, after the agony of the minutes that pass without one rational thought, that

crisis time in which hot-blooded murders are committed, when emotion overcomes reason to the point that grown men scream things like "Kill the Umpire," I brought myself to the crux of the terrible, awful truth: How could I have been so utterly and completely stupid?

When I was back at my quarters and stretched out on my rack, I pulled a letter from home out of my music bag and read it again. Mom was forgiving me for running away from the ship, and apologizing for treating me so badly, apologizing for my father, apologizing for not having the wisdom to support me when I needed it.

"It's okay, Mom," I said out loud. "If you could only tell me how to stop the pain, that would help a lot."

I stared out the window at the approaching summer, the twin towers hovering over me like the rigid military man I thought I would become, the man my father wanted me to be, thought about the woman at the bowling alley, the nights in her arms and what they had meant to me, and what they had not meant to her, the other man who she would marry, and the easy-going man inside the tyrant of Big Ed, the dichotomy of mankind, and laid my head down on the sill and cried.